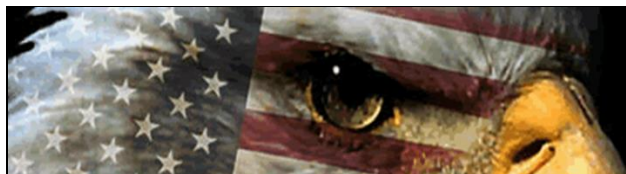



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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	10/26 Remote workers first in recession layoffs?
SOURCE	https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2022-10-26/remote-workers-may-be-the-first-let-go-in-recession-related-layoffs
GIST	WASHINGTON — Ernanda White's layoff was sudden and swift. Eight months of steady work ended in a 15-minute Zoom call.

No office goodbyes. No desk to clean out — not for White, who like millions of others across the country had been working from home.

As recession winds blow and the prospect of layoffs grows, many remote workers are beginning to worry about a potential downside to the at-home arrangement that took hold during the pandemic and has continued even as the crisis recedes.

Are those who seldom visit the office and have little direct physical contact with their supervisors more likely to be fired than those who work at desks just a few feet away? Out of sight, out of mind?

The question has taken on new urgency as employers nationwide cut back and policymakers' strategy for fighting inflation — pushing interest rates ever higher — looks more and more like it will push the economy into a recession.

Data on the issue are almost nonexistent. The next downturn will be the first to occur with so many remote workers in play.

But in one large-scale survey by Beautiful.ai, a maker of business-presentations software, 60% of managers said that remote workers would probably be laid off first.

“Workplace proximity bias could prove to be a troubling issue that managers deal with during this current economic uncertainty,” said Jason Lapp, Beautiful.ai’s chief executive.

“Prejudice against remote workers is obviously not a manager’s intention,” he said, “but sometimes it’s difficult to imagine fair treatment and trust when a batch of employees are working next to you in an office and another group of employees are working at home.”

In White’s case, her former employer, Momentive in San Mateo, Calif., would not say whether remote employees were hit harder than those working on-site.

White, who lives in Dallas, said she had no reason to think so, but added, “I really can’t say.”

The question began to arise early in the COVID-19 pandemic, when working from home came close to being the norm. Some executives and management experts cautioned that it would be easier for bosses to let go of individuals they seldom saw than those they encountered every day.

Others said that even if bias could be avoided, those who were not present would miss out on opportunities to demonstrate their abilities when new and unexpected situations arose in the office.

What is certain is that many workers themselves are worried.

GoodHire, an employment screening firm in Redwood City, Calif., found in a survey that 8 in 10 workers felt working from home would make them more vulnerable in a layoff.

Many fretted that their bosses would view them as lazier or that they would be excluded from important meetings or projects.

A few experts cautioned that it’s too soon to know whether the brunt of job cutbacks will fall on remote workers, noting that companies have an inherent self-interest in keeping high-performing employees, whether they’re in the office or not.

During the pandemic, many employers found remote workers were just as productive, and sometimes even more so.

What's more, offering people the ability to work from home has been a valuable tool in attracting and retaining talent. Remote workers can be cheaper because many live in lower-cost areas, and companies often pay less based on geographical differences.

"Companies want to operate well, make money and keep people who do a good job," said Raymond Berti, an employment attorney at Akerman law firm's office in New York.

Even so, personnel managers say much of the corporate world may be returning to an office culture that favors people working on-site compared with employees in far-flung places.

"During the pandemic, when everyone was working at home, you didn't have a sense of missing out. Everyone was in the same boat," said Linda Shaffer, chief people officer at Checkr, GoodHire's parent firm.

It's different now, she said, with people working at the office, some at home and more in hybrid situations.

"I don't feel companies have figured out how to adjust for human behavior ... to address human bias," she said, referring to how managers will decide which workers to let go.

That bias will be that much stronger if it's coming from top executives, said Andy Challenger, senior vice president at Challenger, Gray & Christmas, an outplacement firm that tracks layoffs. For CEOs who have a strong preference for having people back in the office, he said, letting go of remote workers could be a way of killing two birds with one stone.

"HR leaders know that's a really bad policy, that it would be a blunt tool," Challenger said. "But I think some CEOs are following that path."

There wouldn't be a legal blowback for companies laying off many more employees who work from home versus other employees. Remote workers, as a class, aren't protected from employment discrimination, unlike those filing claims on the bases of, for example, race, gender or age.

Remote workers also may not have the same legal right to notice of a layoff under federal and state laws. The so-called WARN Act requires employers to give 60 days' notice of a mass layoff or plant closing, although there are exceptions. Remote workers fall in a gray area, and neither the courts nor the Department of Labor have made things crystal clear, attorney Berti said.

Meanwhile, even as the labor market has held up remarkably well, layoffs are increasing. The firm Challenger counted almost 30,000 job cuts announced in September by U.S. employers — a 68% increase from the same month in 2021.

Layoffs have surged among tech firms, especially young ones in the San Francisco Bay Area.

In some cases where practically everyone is working from home, it's easy to know that remote workers weren't targeted. Also complicating the picture is the fact that often teleworkers are the most recent hires, and those are typically the first to go.

Carol Raymer, a senior recruiter for DocuSign, said her entire 10-person team that focused on senior-level hiring was laid off last month — and everyone had worked at home.

Raymer, who lives in Fullerton, had joined the San Francisco company about 18 months ago. She was hired via Zoom and was laid off in the same way. DocuSign said through a spokesperson that all its employees are considered remote until the company's currently planned office reopening in February.

But the picture wasn't so clear with many other companies that had cut jobs recently.

Microsoft, for example, confirmed it laid off almost 1,000 workers. But the company wouldn't comment when asked whether people working remotely were affected more than those who worked in the office.

	<p>If it's borne out that employees working from home are more vulnerable, it could drive more people to come into the office, although no one expects a return to the old days. About 30% of all paid workdays are being done from home, up from just 5% before the COVID-19 outbreak, according to the Working From Home Research Project.</p> <p>Many workers have come to value working from home, so much so that 45% said they would take a pay cut to keep working remotely. And about 1 in 3 said they would actually quit or start a remote job search if they were forced to return to the office full time, according to GoodHire's survey.</p> <p>Even if teleworking may be less secure in times of a down economy, many say they would still rather work from home because of the life-work balance, and the saved time and expenses from not commuting.</p> <p>Aware of the need for greater personal connection, White and some of her fellow remote workers in the Dallas area had been planning a get-together to support one another. But they were all laid off before they had the chance.</p> <p>White, who studied civil engineering and education, still doesn't see an inherent disadvantage in job security for remote workers.</p> <p>She is searching for a new job — another fully remote one.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/26 Abandoned Russian files: chaos, retreat
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/ukraine-crisis-russia-base
GIST	<p>BALAKLIIA, Ukraine – The Russian soldiers had fled weeks before. But they left their traces everywhere.</p> <p>Concrete steps led into the basement of their hastily abandoned headquarters in this small riverside town in eastern Ukraine. A bunker smelling of damp lay behind a steel door marked “Command Group.” Papers, some charred, were stuffed into a furnace. Others were scattered across the floor.</p> <p>In a floral notebook, an unnamed staff officer left a sketch of a cartoon soldier and mused about going home. The book's 91 handwritten pages contained other information, too: coordinates of Russian intelligence units, records of calls from commanders, details of battles, men killed and equipment destroyed. And accounts of a breakdown in morale and discipline.</p> <p>In all, the bunker yielded thousands of pages of documents. Reuters reviewed more than a thousand of them. They detail the inner workings of the Russian military and shed new light on events leading up to one of President Vladimir Putin's most stinging battlefield defeats: Russia's chaotic retreat from Ukraine's northeast in September.</p> <p>In the weeks before that defeat, Russian forces were struggling with surveillance and electronic warfare. They were using off-the-shelf drones flown by barely trained soldiers. Their equipment for jamming Ukrainian communications was often out of action. By the end of August, the documents show, the force was depleted, hit by death, desertions and combat stress. Two units – accounting for about a sixth of the total force – were operating at 20% of their full strength.</p> <p>The documents also reveal the increasing effectiveness of Ukraine's forces and offer clues to how the eight-month-old war might unfold, with Russia now under intense pressure on the southern front around the Black Sea coast. In the weeks before their retreat, Russian forces around Balakliia, a town 90 kilometres south of Kharkiv, came under heavy bombardment from HIMARS rocket launchers, recently supplied by the United States. The precision missiles repeatedly hit command posts.</p>

A Russian officer who served in the Balakliia force for three months, described to Reuters a sense of menace hanging over the occupiers. One of his friends bled to death in early September after a Ukrainian strike on a command post in a nearby village.

“It’s a game of roulette,” said the officer, who asked to be identified by his military call sign Plakat Junior 888. “You either get lucky, or you are unlucky. The strikes can land anywhere.”

The Kremlin press service referred questions for this article to the Defence Ministry, which didn’t comment. Russia has said previously its military has everything it needs to fight the war.

The documents in the bunker name Colonel Ivan Popov as the commander of the Russian military force operating from Balakliia. Popov and many of his senior officers belong to the 11th Army Corps, part of the Russian navy’s Baltic Fleet. In 2017, the official newspaper of Russia’s armed forces published a profile of Popov. It said he served in Russia’s war against separatists in Chechnya and the 2008 invasion of ex-Soviet Georgia. He jogged with his men and remembered his officers’ birthdays, it said, adding that Popov “is motivated to achieve success.” Popov did not respond to a message seeking comment. His wife told Reuters he commanded a force in east Ukraine.

The Balakliia force included a commandant responsible for keeping the local civilian population in check. He is identified in the papers by an apparent pseudonym, Commandant V. “Granit” (Granite). He oversaw at least one interrogation centre where civilians were beaten and questioned using electric shocks, according to six former detainees and Ukrainian officials.

Reuters verified the authenticity of the documents by visiting five abandoned military outposts in northeast Ukraine whose coordinates were recorded in the cache. In each instance, local residents confirmed that Russian forces were stationed there. Reuters reporters also interviewed five soldiers who served in the Balakliia force, and cross-checked details in the documents with a contemporaneous account kept by one of the Russian servicemen.

Life under occupation

Russian troops occupied Balakliia, a quiet town of squat apartment buildings surrounded by bucolic villages, in early March. To the south was the Russian controlled Donbas region; to the north the city of Kharkiv, a Ukrainian stronghold.

The soldiers occupied a rundown vehicle repair complex on the outskirts of town. It became the command centre for Balakliia and dozens of surrounding villages and farms. It was here, in the basement, that Reuters found the document cache.

Russian helicopters and drones constantly circled over the base, said Volodymyr Lyovochkin, a local man who managed the premises before the Russians arrived. Dozens of GRAD rocket launchers and other military vehicles were parked in the grounds, he said.

Inside the command room, a Reuters reporter saw desks arranged in a rectangle. Each bore a red nameplate of a military section: combat coordination, electronic warfare, intelligence, unmanned aerial equipment. The section commanders, including the commandant responsible for the civilian population, met here daily, according to rosters that were left amongst the papers. Reuters has identified at least 11 officers who attended these meetings. Five of the officers, including Colonel Popov, didn’t respond to requests for comment. The others couldn’t be reached.

Lists of personnel showed that conscripts from the Russian-controlled Ukrainian region of Luhansk fought alongside men from Russia’s 11th Army Corps. The soldiers scribbled on the walls of the base and put up fliers warning of Ukraine’s descent into Nazi rule if they withdrew. The invaders had brought with them old Soviet maps of Ukraine. A poster admonished the soldiers: Do not smoke, do not drop litter.

The notebook, kept by the unknown staff officer, contained coordinates for Russian military intelligence and other units scattered around the area. One unit had taken over a Balakliia kindergarten.

Lyovochkin, the site's former manager, said Ukrainian investigators had visited the base repeatedly since the Russians retreated. De-miners were still removing the ordinance. "Everything is mined," he said. "They were really protecting themselves."

The base also served as a detention centre for captured Ukrainian veterans. One military veteran told Reuters he was hooded, beaten and thrown into a cellar, where he was held for six days with several others.

Others were detained in Balakliia's police station. Two men - one a firefighter, the other an inspector in the emergency services - said their jailers beat them with wooden batons and administered electric shocks. Russian soldiers questioned the inspector repeatedly about his calls with his supervisor in Kharkiv. They accused him of compiling a list of Ukrainians who had collaborated with the Russians, which he denies. The firefighter said he was accused of hiding weapons and organising a local partisan group, which he too denies. Albina Strilets, a 33-year-old logistics coordinator for the emergency services, recounted that she and other women were held simply for being "pro-Ukrainian."

"I heard men being beaten so badly that at one point I heard a Russian soldier say, 'bring a body bag,'" Strilets said. "Another time I heard a woman being raped upstairs and crying for hours." Strilets said she broke the cell's toilet so "it sounded like a waterfall" and would block out the woman's screaming.

The Kremlin and Russia's Defence Ministry didn't respond to questions about events in Balakliia. Russia has said previously its forces do not target civilians.

Kharkiv regional police said Ukrainian investigators had discovered 22 torture chambers across newly liberated towns and villages in the region. "We cannot count the number of people who were detained. We are talking about hundreds of people. But every crime has a name and we will surely find those responsible," regional police chief General Volodymyr Tymoshko said.

In an office opposite the police station, relatives of prisoners sometimes petitioned the Russian known as Commandant V. "Granit" to free their loved ones. Tetiana Tovstokora, 57, a school principal, said her husband was turned away when he sought information about her detention, which lasted several days. None of the detainees and families interviewed by Reuters had any success in swaying "Granit."

Under occupation, much of the policing of the population fell to the force from separatist Luhansk. It was a rag-tag group with even fewer resources than their Russian counterparts, the documents show. One Luhansk corporal was 64 years old. Another fighter was treated for finger wounds after the chamber of his Mosin rifle exploded, a medic wrote. The rifle was developed in the late 19th century and went out of production decades ago, as Reuters reported in April.

A spreadsheet at the Balakliia bunker showed a typical Russian sergeant was paid 202,084 roubles (\$3,200) a month in salary plus bonuses, while a sergeant in the separatist force received just 91,200 roubles (\$1,400). The head of a Luhansk flame-thrower company recorded in one document that eight of his subordinates had previous convictions - including one man for rape and sexual assault.

A narrow victory

On July 19, four months after seizing the area, the Russian occupiers encountered their first serious challenge from Ukraine's armed forces, the documents reviewed by Reuters show.

At the regular morning meeting in the bunker, reports submitted to the commander, Colonel Popov, were normal: The previous night had been relatively quiet and enemy positions were unchanged. On the agenda for the day: some scheduled artillery fire on Ukrainian positions.

But by early afternoon, a column of Ukrainian soldiers, supported by tanks and under cover of an artillery barrage, attacked the Russian front line at Hrakove - a village on the north-western edge of the territory held by the Balakliia force.

Troops belonging to Russia's 9th motorised rifle regiment were holed up in a concrete grain elevator in Hrakove. They'd positioned guns along the top of the structure. A Reuters reporter who visited the facility in October saw signs the men slept on the grain conveyor belts.

By 15:00, an unnamed Russian on the front line at Hrakove radioed his commanders in Balakliia: His position was being overrun, he said, and he had to retreat. He requested artillery strikes to destroy the post he was abandoning. Then communication was lost.

In the Balakliia bunker, the anonymous staff officer wrote in his notebook: "The munitions are running out."

The commander of the Western Military District, one of Russia's most senior officers, demanded a briefing on the situation and "ordered that Hrakove must not be surrendered," further notebook entries said. According to official records, the commander at the time was Colonel-General Alexander Zhuravlyov, since fired by Putin. Independent Russian military analysts CIT have said, however, that Zhuravlyov was replaced by July by Lieutenant-General Andrei Sychevoi. Reuters was unable to reach Zhuravlyov. Sychevoi didn't respond to a request for comment.

In the hours that followed, Russian commanders sent in reinforcements and mobilised attack helicopters. By 18:00, the Ukrainians were retreating and Russian forces were retaking lost ground. But the cost was high. The Russians lost a tank, two armoured personnel carriers and other equipment. Thirty-nine men were wounded, seven were dead, and 17 were reported missing, according to a report that was presented to Popov on July 21.

Among the Russian dead was Corporal Aleksandr Yevsevlev, a tank commander. A list of casualties inside the command bunker said his abdomen had been torn open, exposing his intestines, and he had shrapnel injuries to his right upper thigh. His parents, contacted by Reuters, said their son was fatally wounded when his position came under fire near Hrakove from a Ukrainian helicopter.

After the battle, five soldiers needed treatment for "acute reaction to stress." Next to each of their names in the medical record was written: "Does not require evacuation."

A soldier in his twenties was listed as having suffered blast injuries. Contacted by Reuters, the man said he remembered little, only that "the fighting was fierce." He spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Following the battle, Colonel Popov applied to his superiors for 34 of his subordinates to be given medals for their bravery. The documents did not detail how his superiors responded. Two of the soldiers told Reuters they have yet to receive their awards.

Pyotr Kalinin, a 25-year-old commander of a reconnaissance platoon, was also on Popov's list. Kalinin is from Crimea and briefly served as a cadet in Ukraine's armed forces before Russia annexed the peninsula in 2014, according to his social media. A photograph shows him in a Ukrainian uniform. Kalinin didn't respond to messages from Reuters seeking comment.

Near breaking point

Documents in the bunker show that Russian commanders understood the shortcomings of their force.

On July 19, hours before the battle of Hrakove, an unnamed officer scribbled on the daily briefing note a plea for drones to track the enemy: "Quadcopters!!! Urgent!" Quadcopter drones are generally not military grade and can be bought in store and on the internet. As Reuters reported in June, Russian troops have relied on crowdfunding to buy drones.

The Balakliia force finally took receipt of three off-the-shelf Mavic-3 quadcopter drones on July 20, the daily report recorded. They weren't ready to fly, however, because their software wasn't yet installed. The same daily report stated 15 soldiers were being trained how to operate them.

Ukrainian forces, meanwhile, were busy flying drones over Russian positions, their task made all the easier because two of the Russian force's three jamming devices were out of action in need of repair, according to a note on a report by the electronic warfare unit.

The daily report on July 21 contained even more alarming news for Colonel Popov, the commander of the Balakliia force: Russian intelligence agency, the FSB had learned that Ukrainian forces were bringing to the area three highly accurate HIMARS missile launchers, supplied by the United States. And Ukraine had pinpointed the locations of one Russian command post and four warehouses that were being used by the Balakliia force.

Ukraine's Defence Ministry and military did not respond to questions about weaponry and tactics.

Three days later, on July 24, the author of the handwritten notebook recorded that a HIMARS strike had killed 12 Russian soldiers belonging to the 336th marines brigade of the Baltic Fleet.

The fight further eroded morale and discipline among the soldiers.

Artyom Shtanko commanded a platoon that was in the thick of the Hrakove battle and suffered losses, according to his father Alexei and Plakat Junior 888, the officer who served in the Balakliia force.

Alexei said Shtanko refused an order from his company commander to "send his men into artillery fire." Plakat Junior 888 identified the commander as Viktor Alyokhin, who was operating from a command post near Hrakove. Contacted by Reuters, Alyokhin confirmed he was in charge of a company during the battle but declined to comment further.

At the base in Balakliia, the notebook's anonymous author wrote on July 24 – five days after the Hrakove battle – that Shtanko was a "bastard" facing disciplinary action because he "pulled back his platoon and took it into the rear."

Shtanko's commanders moved him to a different unit, his father told Reuters. He said Shtanko is still fighting in Ukraine.

The notebook also recorded the desertion of Roman Elistratov, a corporal in the 9th motorised rifle regiment, which felt the full force of the Ukrainian onslaught. Elistratov didn't respond to messages from Reuters. Later, the author wrote of a soldier who deliberately shot himself in the hand to avoid further action. Command should be notified of the incident, he added.

None of these details made it into the official reports seen by Reuters.

"No supplies"

By the end of July, Russian officers were convinced Ukrainian forces were preparing a counter-offensive to "take control of Balakliia," the documents in the bunker show. Intercepted communications indicated an attack was imminent. Some of the communications were from cell phones registered to countries including Estonia, Britain, the Netherlands and the United States. Russian officers in the command bunker concluded the phones were in the possession of mercenaries or foreign instructors helping the Ukrainian military. Approached for this article, Estonia said its defence forces were not operating inside Ukraine. Britain, the United States and the Netherlands didn't respond.

Around the same time, Russian military-electronics experts arrived in Balakliia. They wanted to see if Russia's "Pole-21" system for jamming satellite navigation systems could be adapted to counter HIMARS missiles, according to the daily report of Aug 4.

Whatever the outcome of that experiment, Ukrainian strikes continued. Interviews with Russian servicemen, relatives of dead soldiers, and local residents indicate that at least three Russian command posts in northeast Ukraine were hit by HIMARS missiles in the weeks that followed.

Faced with increased Ukrainian attacks, the Balakliia command set about drafting in more troops, according to daily reports and records in the staff officer's handwritten notebook. Yet a spreadsheet dated Aug. 30 showed that the force was at only 71% of full strength. Some units were far worse off, according to the same spreadsheet. The 2nd assault battalion had 49 personnel. It should have had 240. The 9th BARS brigade, an irregular unit, was at 23% of its intended manpower.

Another spreadsheet tracked equipment. Where there had been five drones on July 25, by the end of August there were only two. Eight armoured personnel carriers were reduced to three. The force had four "Fagot" anti-tank weapons systems left, down from 24 at the end of July. The one "Zoopark" system they had for suppressing enemy electronics systems was gone by the end of August.

Plakat Junior 888, the Russian officer interviewed by Reuters, described trying to fight off successive Ukrainian attacks during August without adequate supplies. The small calendar he kept in the trenches during his three months rotation paints a dire picture. Days were marked with scribbled notes saying "Attack" and "Escaped from encirclement" or bearing the names of comrades killed in action. Aug. 27 was marked simply as "the worst day." That, he said, was when their position came under heavy artillery attack, and one of his friends died in his arms.

"There were no supplies of munitions or drones," he said of the situation in late August. Ukrainian forces mounted attacks, but "our artillery was not working in response."

Chaos and retreat

Ukraine's counter-offensive began in earnest on Sept 6.

A Russian soldier who was in Hrakove that day told Reuters that Ukraine first attacked Russian positions with artillery. By the evening Ukrainian forces had outflanked them. At that point, the order was given to retreat from the village, he said.

The battle continued. Between Sept 6 and 8, precision strikes hit the command centre in Balakliia. Lyovochkin, the local who formerly managed the site, said the entire facility erupted in flames. Dozens of bodies of Russian soldiers were pulled from the rubble, he said.

"My house was dancing" from the blast, he said.

A video posted on social media on Sept 10 showed Ukrainian soldiers viewing the destroyed hangar where Russian forces had kept their vehicles. "This is what the result of HIMARS' work looks like," said a voice in Ukrainian in the video.

Nataliia and Viktor, an elderly couple who live less than 300 metres from the bunker, said they heard constant Ukrainian strikes in the final days of the occupation. When the attacks ceased on the 8th, the couple saw 30 soldiers, many of them wounded, limping along the road in retreat. Two other residents said they saw Russian soldiers throw away their guns and abandon their vehicles as they ran away.

"It was just chaos," said one of the two locals, Serhii, who lived across the street from the command headquarters. "There was a traffic jam" of fleeing Russians, he said.

Other Ukrainians described how fighters from Luhansk fled, often trailing behind the retreating Russian military.

Weeks after the Russian retreat, all that remained of the headquarters was a crater and a pile of documents. A plume of smoke rose from a heap of burnt out Russian equipment.

Popov, the force commander, was injured at some point and spent a month in hospital, his wife told Reuters. She said he has since been promoted to the rank of general and is about to head off on a new assignment. She didn't disclose where.

	<p>The last, undated notebook entries by the anonymous staff officer are reflective.</p> <p>“If you sit and look at the river for long enough, you will eventually see your enemies floating by,” he wrote.</p> <p>One page later, he appears to be imagining his life in the future, in a city on the Russian border with China, 7,000 km from Balakliia.</p> <p>“I went home on Aug 10, 2023, I’m already home with my family,” he wrote. “I’m having a nice time in Khabarovsk with my family, with my wife and my girls.”</p>
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HEADLINE	10/26 Mortgages to 7.16%; highest since 2001
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/finance/streettalk/30-year-mortgages-7-16-interest-rates-federal-reserve/2022/10/26/id/1093449/
GIST	<p>The average interest rate on the most popular U.S. home loan rose to its highest level since 2001 as tightening financial conditions weigh on the housing sector, data from the Mortgage Bankers Association (MBA) showed Wednesday.</p> <p>The average contract rate on a 30-year fixed-rate mortgage rose by 22 basis points to 7.16% for the week ended Oct. 21 while the MBA's Market Composite Index, a measure of mortgage loan application volume, fell 1.7% from a week earlier. Mortgage application activity is at its slowest pace since 1997.</p> <p>Mortgage rates have more than doubled since the beginning of the year, as the Federal Reserve pursues an aggressive path of interest rate hikes to rein in stubbornly high inflation.</p> <p>The central bank is expected to raise rates by 75 basis points for a fourth straight time at the conclusion of its next policy meeting on Nov. 1-2.</p> <p>Those actions, designed to cool the economy sufficiently to curb price pressures, have weighed heavily on the interest-rate-sensitive housing sector as expectations for Fed tightening have led to a surge in Treasury yields.</p> <p>The yield on the 10-year note acts as a benchmark for mortgage rates.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/25 Saudi minister blasts release of oil reserve
SOURCE	https://www.msn.com/en-au/money/markets/saudi-blasts-release-of-oil-reserves-to-manipulate-markets/ar-AA13mFFz
GIST	<p>Saudi Arabia's energy minister on Tuesday blasted the release of emergency oil stocks as an attempt to "manipulate markets", the latest apparent salvo in a spat with Washington over oil production.</p> <p>"People are depleting their emergency stocks, had depleted it, used it as a mechanism to manipulate markets while its profound purpose was to mitigate shortage of supply," Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman told an investor conference in the Saudi capital.</p> <p>"However, it is my profound duty to make it clear to the world that losing emergency stock may become painful in the months to come."</p> <p>Prince Abdulaziz did not single out the United States in his comments about emergency stocks, but last week US President Joe Biden announced he was putting the final 15 million barrels on the market from a record release of US strategic reserves.</p>

That tranche was to complete a 180-million-barrel release authorised in the spring, in response to price hikes linked to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

It also came on the heels of a decision by the OPEC+ oil cartel, which Riyadh co-leads with Moscow, to cut oil production by two million barrels a day from November.

The cartel's decision, weeks ahead of US congressional elections, has drawn intense criticism from the White House, which has said it amounted to "aligning with Russia" in the Ukraine war.

Prince Abdulaziz pushed back against that assessment on Tuesday.

"I keep listening, are you with us or against us? Is there any room for, 'We are for Saudi Arabia and for the people of Saudi Arabia'?" he said to applause.

Asked about getting the decades-old partnership between Riyadh and Washington back on track, he said: "I think we as Saudi Arabia decided to be the maturer guys and let the dice fall."

In Washington, State Department spokesman Ned Price said he would not respond directly to the prince, but that the release from the strategic reserve was part of Biden's effort to meet demand.

"We're going to do everything we can to see to it that supply is adequate for demand," Price told reporters.

Also speaking at the Riyadh conference, Saudi investment minister Khalid al-Falih described the dust-up with the United States as "unwarranted" and temporary.

"If you look at the relationship with the people side, the corporate side, the education system, you look at our institutions working together, we are very close, and we will get over this recent spat that I think was unwarranted," he said.

JPMorgan Chief Executive Jamie Dimon also said he was optimistic that bilateral ties would eventually improve.

"Saudi Arabia and the US have been allies for the last 75 years... They'll work it through," he said.

"These countries will remain allies going forward."

- Davos in the Desert -

Hundreds of CEOs and finance moguls are in Riyadh for the three-day Future Investment Initiative (FII), a Davos-style investment conference that analysts say will highlight Saudi Arabia's geopolitical muscle despite strained ties with Washington.

The FII, often referred to as "Davos in the Desert", was launched in 2017 as an economic coming-out party for the world's largest crude exporter, which is trying to diversify away from oil under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

The 37-year-old who is first in line to the throne "takes a very hands-on approach" to projects associated with his Vision 2030 reform agenda, said Kristin Diwan of the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington.

"Ultimately those attending will know that they will need his approval or those of his confidants to work in the kingdom," she said.

Up to 400 American CEOs are expected to participate in the conference, though unlike in previous years there is no representation from the US government.

The event's organiser told AFP last week that American officials had not been invited.

	<p>"Saudi Arabia needs to attract American investment, technology, and popular interest to succeed," Diwan said.</p> <p>"It still remains to be seen if this broader engagement can be maintained if the political mood in the United States turns hostile toward Saudi Arabia."</p>
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HEADLINE	10/25 Belarus hospitals, morgues drafted into war
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2022/10/europe/belarus-hospitals-russian-soldiers-ukraine/index.html
GIST	<p>Vilnius, Lithuania — As his daughters dozed off in the back seat, his wife filmed him driving, eyes narrowed, focused on the dark road ahead. Andrei, a doctor, had been plotting their escape from Belarus since 2020, when the Kremlin-backed regime cracked down on a popular uprising, sending the country spiraling deeper into authoritarian rule and engulfing it in a climate of fear.</p> <p>When Russia launched its assault on Ukraine from Belarus' southern doorstep, getting out suddenly felt more urgent. His family watched from the windows of their apartment block as helicopters and missiles thundered through the sky. Within days, Andrei — whose name has been changed for his safety — said he found himself being forced to treat Russian soldiers injured in Moscow's botched assault on the Ukrainian capital Kyiv. Then, at the end of March, he was jailed on trumped-up corruption charges. After his release in May, and carefully weighing the risks, he decided it was time to leave.</p> <p>So as not to spark any suspicion, Andrei asked one of their neighbors to sneak the family's suitcases, filled with legal documents, a few clothes and a photo album, out of their building and stash them in a car. Late one Friday evening in August, after he had finished his shift at the hospital, they met in a parking lot without any security cameras to pick up their bags. Then the family set off.</p> <p>It had taken Andrei months to chart out the best route — asking for advice over encrypted messaging apps from a Belarusian medical solidarity group, activist organizations and others living in exile.</p> <p>Driving through the night, they traveled from their home in Mazyr, a city in Belarus' southern Gomel region, more than 370 miles north to the country's border with Lithuania finally reaching the point where he had been told he could cross.</p> <p>They stopped on a rural, dirt road and Andrei kissed his wife and girls goodbye. All being well, they would cross through the official border checkpoint and reunite with him in Lithuania, where he planned to claim asylum. Inside one of his daughter's toys, Andrei had hidden a USB flash drive carrying evidence of what he had witnessed — dozens of X-rays of wounded Russian soldiers. He told them he loved them, turned and walked into the woods.</p> <p>As Andrei made his way through tangled undergrowth, disoriented, he came across a Belarusian border police booth and felt a sense of terror — he knew his name was on a government list of people banned from leaving the country and, if his passport information was checked, he would be thrown back in prison.</p> <p>Mercifully, the booth was empty. And when he reached the river bank, he swam as quickly as he could, his heart racing.</p> <p>On the other side, Andrei recalled, a heavy-set Lithuanian man stood holding a fishing pole, his eyes wide. Speaking in Russian, he said it was the first time he'd seen someone fleeing. "Is it really so bad in Belarus?" the man asked.</p> <p>"Yes," Andrei answered, thinking back over all that Belarusians had endured at the hands of his country's brutal regime, and now the bloody war they had been drawn into. "It is."</p>

Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko allowed his close ally Russia in February to use the country, which shares a 674-mile border with Ukraine, as a staging ground for its invasion. With his permission, Russian President Vladimir Putin treated Belarus as an extension of Moscow's territory, sending equipment and around 30,000 troops ostensibly for [joint military exercises](#) — the biggest deployment to the former Soviet state since the end of the Cold War. Russia erected temporary camps and hospitals in Belarus' frozen fields, dispatching military hardware, artillery, helicopters and fighter jets near the border.

When [Putin declared his “special military operation”](#) in a pre-dawn televised address on February 24, he sent missiles, paratroopers and a huge armored column of soldiers rolling south from Belarusian soil, setting in motion what was intended to be a lightning strike to decapitate the government in Kyiv. But as Russia's advance stalled and setbacks mounted, Moscow began to spirit wounded soldiers back across the border to Belarus for treatment in several civilian hospitals, a CNN investigation has revealed. The doctors working there were drafted into a war that they didn't sign up for, unwittingly enlisted as quasi-combat medics and obliged by their hippocratic oath to provide life-saving care.

Many were forced to sign non-disclosure agreements, told not to speak about what they saw. Some, like Andrei, later fled. From their operating tables, Belarusian medical workers gained perhaps the clearest sense of the scale of casualties suffered by Russia in the early weeks of the war — describing young, shell-shocked soldiers who thought they were being sent for exercises only to find themselves losing a limb in a war they were ill-prepared to fight. While [Lukashenko admitted](#) that Belarus was providing medical aid to Russian military personnel, little is known about what happened in the hospitals where they were taken, which were kept under strict surveillance. In interviews with Belarusian doctors, members of the country's medical diaspora, human rights activists, military analysts and security sources, CNN examined the role Belarus played in treating Russian casualties, while [the Kremlin sought to conceal them](#). Their testimonies and documentation — including medical records — offer insights into the Belarusian government's complicity in the Ukraine war, as fears mount that the country might be sucked further into the fight.

Exactly how many Russian soldiers have been killed or wounded in Ukraine remains a mystery to all but a few inside the Kremlin. The Russian defense ministry said on March 2 that early casualties amounted to 498 Russian soldiers killed and nearly 1,600 injured in action. But [US and NATO estimates](#) around the same time put the number of dead significantly higher: between 3,000 and 10,000. Seven months into the war, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu revised the official tally, saying nearly 6,000 Russian soldiers had died. The Pentagon said in August that it believed the true toll was much more: as many as [80,000 dead or wounded](#).

Belarus' stranglehold on information — Lukashenko's regime has put independent news media under severe pressure, restricted free speech and introduced new legislation extending the death penalty for “attempts to carry out acts of terrorism” — has provided useful cover for Russia in repressing details about its injured and dead. In recent months, a number of people have been arrested for filming Russian military vehicles, according to Viasna, a Belarusian human rights organization whose imprisoned founder was recently [awarded the Nobel Peace Prize](#).

In spite of the repressive environment, hints of Moscow's troop losses have emerged on social media and local reports. In late February, the [Belarusian Hajun project](#), an activist monitoring group that tracks military activity in the country, started sharing images on Telegram of Russian medical vehicles ferrying fighters across the border from the frontline. Drawing on a network of trusted local sources, the group posted footage of green, Soviet-era “PAZ” buses marked with red crosses and a white letter “V” — a symbol believed to stand for “Vostok”, or east — and armored ambulances in Gomel region.

It appeared some were being taken to field hospitals, which had popped up near Belarus' border with Ukraine. Other medical vehicles were spotted near hospitals in the cities of Gomel and Mazyr.

“We can confirm they (Russians) used Belarusian infrastructure, including medical buildings and field hospitals. They also used morgues ... and they used train stations or airbases to transport dead people or injured people, we have photos of that,” Anton Motolko, a Belarusian blogger who fled Minsk in 2020 and

founded Belarusian Hajun project, told CNN. Motolko said his sources told him that morgues in the area were overflowing, and that a steady stream of wounded soldiers had arrived at Mazyr City Hospital, where Andrei worked.

In mid-February, Andrei watched in horror as his hometown of Mazyr seemingly turned into a sprawling military base — armored tanks rolled down the streets, Russian soldiers roamed local shops and got drunk at bars downtown. He and his family no longer felt safe, and avoided being outside after dark. Soon they began to suspect that Russia was preparing for war. As the military drills were due to wrap up on February 20, Andrei said his hospital administration extended a directive to treat Russian soldiers free of charge until March 10. "They must have thought the war would end by then," Andrei said, adding that, two days later, Russian officers from the field hospital outside Mazyr cleaned out the city's blood bank reserves.

On the morning of February 24, the first day of fighting, Andrei recalled a hospital official gathering all of the doctors into a meeting room, ordering them to keep 250 beds free for Russian casualties, stop all planned surgeries and send what Belarusian patients they could home. "Then they warned us that we were not allowed to share any information about Russian soldiers. We had to sign a non-disclosure form, forbidding us to share any photos, documents," Andrei said. "They told us that we were being watched by the Russian Federal Security Services (FSB), that they had ways of monitoring our phones." While he didn't see any Russian FSB, Andrei said he did notice local Belarusian State Security Committee (KGB) agents stalking the halls of the hospital. CNN has reached out to Mazyr City Hospital for comment.

Aliaksandr Azarau, head of ByPol, an organization set up by ex-Belarusian police and security service members, told CNN that Mazyr authorities went to great lengths to keep information about the number of wounded Russian soldiers, and the types of injuries they sustained, under wraps. Azarau said that the KGB departments for Mazyr, along with the region's department of internal affairs, put Mazyr City Hospital "under round-the-clock surveillance" while "warning the staff of personal responsibility for disclosing information about military personnel undergoing treatment in the hospital."

Still, Andrei managed to secretly photocopy the X-rays of dozens of troops treated at Mazyr City Hospital, which he shared with CNN. "What I took with me, that part of the archive, could have gotten me into legal trouble for espionage," he said, adding that he had taken the risk to provide evidence of a side of the war that has so far gone unseen, smuggling them out of Belarus in his daughter's toy cellphone. The scans included the names and ages of the soldiers, many of whom were between 19 and 21 years old, capturing their injuries in stark black and white.

Andrei said he saw the biggest wave of casualties arrive at Mazyr hospital en masse in the early hours of February 28. After receiving a call that the soldiers were incoming, the doctors assembled at the entrance to the emergency room around midnight, waiting. Soon, busloads of injured troops began to pour in. Russian soldiers carted them inside on stretchers, dumping them at the front doors, Andrei said.

The doctors quickly assessed the soldiers' injuries, drawing numbers on their foreheads to mark them by priority, triaging their wounds and sending them off for scans or surgeries.

Altogether, more than 100 Russian troops arrived with injuries to the face, gaping wounds, compound fractures from explosions and coming under fire, Andrei said.

On the same day, a local state-run TV channel released a report claiming the hospital was running normally, which Andrei said he saw as an attempt to stymie rumors that it was treating Russian troops.

In reality, the hospital was full of soldiers, Andrei said. Some were missing eyes, others required amputations — having arrived with gangrenous, shattered limbs — a few were paralyzed, one had lost part of his brain, another his lower jaw. Several had been wearing tourniquets for days to staunch the blood, their bodies peppered with bullets and shrapnel, the X-rays showed. "There were more wounded, in need of an operation, than we had operating tables," Andrei said. "The Russians just gave us their injured [soldiers], and didn't give a damn about them."

Many of the Russians had been fighting in areas outside of Kyiv — in Hostomel, where they suffered major losses at a key airfield, in [Bucha](#) and Borodianka, suburbs that they terrorized for weeks, and in [Chernobyl](#), where their forces were exposed to radiation in the highly toxic zone known as the “Red Forest.” Andrei said he treated Russian paratroopers and special forces injured in the botched assault on [Hostomel airfield](#), where they told him their helicopter came under attack. “They were professional killers. We had to treat them, that was our job. I felt disgusted by the whole thing. But, as a doctor, I am not really allowed to feel disgusted,” he said. Russian Major General Sergei Nyrkov, who suffered a severe abdominal injury in Chernobyl, was also treated at Mazyr hospital, according to his X-ray, which was among those Andrei smuggled out.

But the majority of the injured were young, inexperienced soldiers and conscripts from remote parts of Russia, Andrei said. CNN has reached out to the Russian Ministry of Defense about these allegations, as well as accusations it has co-opted Belarus to carry out an “act of aggression” against Ukraine, in violation of international law.

On March 1, at a meeting of Belarus’ Security Council, [Lukashenko acknowledged](#) that hospitals were providing Russian soldiers with life-saving treatment. “We treat them and will continue treating these guys – in Gomel, Mazyr, and I think in some other district capital when they are transported to us. What’s wrong with that? Injured people have always received medical treatment during any war,” he said, before dismissing reports that Russia had suffered huge losses as fake news.

“Our self-exiled opposition and the rest shout about thousands of injured [Russian military personnel] delivered to Gomel. Nothing like that. We’ve treated about 160-170 injured in this entire period,” Lukashenko added.

But Andrei and other medical professionals in the region tell a different story. In early March, 40 to 50 Russian casualties were brought to Mazyr City Hospital every day, shuttled in and out again like a “conveyor belt,” Andrei said. Most arrived in the dark of night, or early in the morning, in green Russian military buses and ambulances. “We, the doctors at the hospital, thought that maybe they were worried about security, so they brought them under the cover of the night. They were afraid of road traffic to see the red cross on their vehicles. People would know,” Andrei said. The Russians also tried to bring the dead to the hospital, he said, adding: “They didn’t know what to do with them.”

Anna Krasulina, spokeswoman for exiled Belarusian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, told Ukrainian parliamentary TV channel “Rada” in March that the morgues in Mazyr were flooded with the bodies of dead Russian soldiers. In April, Tsikhanouskaya met with members of the US State Department in Washington, DC, [handing over evidence](#) of Lukashenko’s involvement in the war in Ukraine. The documents, seen by CNN, detail how Belarus provided key infrastructure to Russia, including missile launch positions, railway lines, and medical assistance.

Citing open source information, Franak Viačorka, Tsikhanouskaya’s chief political adviser, told CNN that Russians were using hospitals in both the Gomel and Brest regions between the start of the war and April, but that there were also “many cases when doctors refused to take Russian soldiers,” describing this as grassroots resistance. He added that Russians have not been using infrastructure like hospitals in Belarus since April.

Mazyr was one of at least three hospitals in Gomel region that treated Russian casualties, according to medical and security sources, who estimated that the facilities collectively cared for hundreds of soldiers. Mikalai, a doctor who left the region and whose name has also been changed for his safety, said that the Regional Clinical Hospital and the Republican Research Center for Radiation Medicine and Human Ecology were among those providing treatment, but that the latter was largely operating with Russian medical staff brought in for the war.

After receiving a patient transferred from the Republican Research Center for Radiation Medicine and Human Ecology, Mikalai said that he had been curious about how the hospital was operating. So, late one night, he drove slowly past the complex. “I saw when it started getting dark, military medical buses

coming to the hospital ... green-colored 'PAZ' vehicles, with their windows covered with white cloth," he said.

Azarau, the head of ByPol, said that the Republican Research Center for Radiation Medicine and Human Ecology was used to treat Russian servicemen who took part in the assault on the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, some of whom showed signs of radiation poisoning. The hospital was originally built in the early 1990s to provide specialized medical care to the local population affected by the Chernobyl disaster. Mikalai said it was no surprise that the Belarusian and Russian authorities went to great lengths to keep the reality of what was happening behind closed doors in these hospitals a secret. "A great number of wounded young soldiers is a dirty, dirty stain that does not correlate with the idea of this great Russian invasion," he said, adding that the authorities wanted to give the impression that the situation was under control and reports of a huge number of casualties were fake. "But this is the bad truth ... they tried to hide it."

Unpicking the role that Belarus has played in the Ukraine war has taken on new urgency since Lukashenko announced in October that Russian soldiers would deploy to the country to form a new, "regional grouping" and carry out joint exercises with Belarusian troops, raising fears that he might draw the country [more directly into the conflict](#).

"The fact is that Belarus long ago ceded its sovereignty in significant ways to Russia," State Department spokesperson Ned Price said in a briefing on October 12, responding to a question about Belarus' posturing, which the United States is monitoring closely. "The fact that President Putin has been able to use what should be sovereign Belarusian territory as a staging ground, the fact that brutal attacks against the people of Ukraine have emanated from a sovereign third country, Belarus in this case, it is another testament to the fact that the Lukashenko regime does not have the best interests of its people at heart."

Not only has Russia infringed on Belarus' sovereignty, it has also posed a serious challenge to NATO — three members of the alliance share a border with Belarus. Putin has been laying the groundwork to transform Belarus into a vassal state for some time. After a rigged presidential election in 2020 cemented Lukashenko's long reign, triggering [widespread pro-democracy protests](#), he clung to power with the help of Putin. Russia backed the [ruthless crackdown](#) on demonstrations, and gave Belarus a \$1.5 billion lifeline to evade the brunt of sanctions, but it came with strings attached. Beholden to the Kremlin, Lukashenko has supported Russia's military actions from the sidelines, so far avoiding sending his own troops into the fray. But he may be forced to shift his position, as [Putin racks up losses](#).

"As far as our participation in the special military operation in Ukraine is concerned, we are participating in it. We do not hide it. But we are not killing anyone," Lukashenko said in early October. "We offer medical aid to people. We've treated people if necessary," he added.

Still, many in Belarus are terrified that might change. A majority of Belarusians do not want their country to take part in the war, according to a recent Chatham House poll conducted online, which found that only 5% favored sending troops to support Russia. Andrej Stryzhak, a Belarusian human rights activist and founder of BySol, an initiative that supports victims of political persecution in Belarus, who himself faces politically motivated charges for "funding extremist formations," said that the organization saw a surge in requests for help when the invasion started. The group set up a Telegram channel with advice on how to flee abroad, for people who don't support the war or were afraid of being mobilized themselves. "We took more than 10,000 consultations ... and now we have a Telegram channel with 30,000 subscribers," Stryzhak said, adding: "It's very intensive work for us."

Andrei reached out to BySol for help getting out of the country, but in late August, with the borders to Ukraine and Russia largely impassible, they were unable to assist him. In the end, he was aided by an informal network of Belarusian dissidents living in exile in Lithuania, who identify potential crossing points. They said they too have seen a surge in the number of Belarusian men fleeing for fear they will be [forced to fight in Ukraine](#).

Having seen the havoc that the war has wrought first hand, Andrei said he was concerned that he might be sent into Ukraine as a combat medic. In Russia, doctors are increasingly coming under pressure. Earlier this month, Russian state-run news agency Tass reported that physicians in St. Petersburg received letters from authorities telling them not to leave the country for “security reasons,” and Russia’s parliament said around 3,000 doctors could be called up as part of Putin’s “[partial mobilization](#)” of troops.

In late March, Andrei was arrested alongside dozens of other Belarusian doctors, many of whom specialized in surgery, on charges of corruption and receiving bribes, which he denies. After being jailed in the Belarusian capital Minsk for a month and a half, Andrei said he got the sense that their detention may have been an intimidation tactic — to make them think twice before leaving the country. When he was released, he said he was contacted by his local military branch and told to enlist in the army. “I was asked to come to the military enlistment office with my documents ... Of course, I didn’t go there,” Andrei said. He fled the country shortly after.

Now settled in another European country with his family, Andrei is relieved to no longer be wondering when or if he might be sent to war. Instead, he’s focused on sitting national medical exams so he can start to practice again in his new home.

“Ukraine is very dear to me. I was worried about my close friends and family living there,” he said, adding that Belarus’ complicity in the war was unbearable. “We wrote to each other ‘Slava Ukraini,’ saying that Ukraine was going to win. My relatives said that we would all outlive all of this. And yet the bombs were being launched at them from the territory where I lived.”

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HEADLINE	10/26 China inhalable Covid vaccine
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/china-covid-vaccine-inhaled-mouth/
GIST	<p>The Chinese city of Shanghai started administering an inhalable COVID-19 vaccine on Wednesday in what appears to be a world first.</p> <p>The vaccine, a mist that is sucked in through the mouth, is being offered for free as a booster dose for previously vaccinated individuals, according to an announcement posted on an official city social media account.</p> <p>Needle-free vaccines may persuade people who don't like getting a shot to get vaccinated, as well as help expand vaccination in poor countries because they're easier to administer.</p> <p>China doesn't have vaccine mandates but wants more people to get booster shots before it relaxes strict pandemic restrictions that are holding back the economy and increasingly out of synch with the rest of the world.</p> <p>A video posted by an online Chinese state media outlet showed people at a community health center sticking the short nozzle of a translucent white cup into their mouths. Accompanying text said that after slowly inhaling, one individual held his breath for five seconds, with the entire procedure completed in 20 seconds.</p> <p>"It was like drinking a cup of milk tea," one Shanghai resident said in the video. "When I breathed it in, it tasted a bit sweet."</p> <p>A vaccine taken in the mouth could also fend off the virus before it reaches the rest of the respiratory system, though that would depend in part on the size of the droplets, one expert said.</p> <p>Larger droplets would train defenses in parts of the mouth and throat, while smaller ones would travel further into the body, said Dr. Vineeta Bal, an immunologist in India.</p>

	<p>Chinese regulators approved the vaccine for use as a booster in September. It was developed by Chinese biopharmaceutical company Cansino Biologics Inc. as an aerosol version of the same company's one-shot adenovirus vaccine, which uses a relatively harmless cold virus.</p> <p>Cansino has said the inhaled vaccine has completed clinical trials in China, Hungary, Pakistan, Malaysia, Argentina and Mexico.</p> <p>Regulators in India have approved a nasal vaccine, another needle-free approach, but it has yet to be rolled out. The vaccine, developed in the U.S. and licensed to Indian vaccine maker Bharat Biotech, is squirted in the nose.</p> <p>About a dozen nasal vaccines are being tested globally, according to the World Health Organization.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/26 NKorea put on notice for nuclear test
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/north-korea-warned-nuclear-test-unprecedented-response/
GIST	<p>The United States, Japan and South Korea warned Wednesday that a North Korean nuclear test would warrant an "unprecedentedly strong response," vowing unity after a blitz of missile launches from the hermit state.</p> <p>Following talks in Tokyo, the three nations' deputy foreign ministers said they would ramp up their deterrence in the region.</p> <p>"We agreed to further strengthen cooperation ... so that North Korea can immediately stop its illegal activities and return to denuclearization talks," said South Korea's Cho Hyun-dong.</p> <p>"The three countries agreed on the need for an unprecedentedly strong response if North Korea proceeds with its seventh nuclear test," he told reporters.</p> <p>Seoul and Washington have repeatedly warned that Pyongyang could be close to testing an atomic bomb for the first time since 2017, after a flurry of ballistic missile launches.</p> <p>One missile flew over Japan last month, and North Korea has separately claimed to have carried out tactical nuclear drills.</p> <p>"All of this behavior is reckless and deeply destabilizing," said U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, urging North Korea to "refrain from further provocations."</p> <p>According to The Associated Press, Sherman stressed that the U.S. commitment to the security of South Korea and Japan is "ironclad," adding that the U.S. would "use the full range of U.S. defense capabilities to defend our allies, including nuclear, conventional and missile defense capabilities."</p> <p>Last month, the North's leader, Kim Jong Un, declared the country an "irreversible" nuclear power, effectively ending negotiations over his banned arms programs.</p> <p>Kim met three times with President Biden's predecessor Donald Trump, reducing tensions but resulting in no lasting agreement, and the country has shown little interest in taking up Mr. Biden's offer of working-level talks.</p> <p>Japan's Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, Takeo Mori, said North Korea's "intensifying nuclear and missile activities ... are a clear and serious challenge to the international community."</p> <p>"We agreed to ramp up the deterrence in our region with a view towards the denuclearisation of North Korea," he said.</p>

	<p>The trio said they had also discussed a wide range of issues including the war in Ukraine, China and Taiwan.</p> <p>But Mori and Cho said there'd been no discussion of bilateral relations between Japan and South Korea, which have long been strained.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/26 Potential 'tripledeemic': flu, RSV, Covid-19
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/us-facing-potential-tripledeemic-flu-rsv-covid-19/story?id=91997909
GIST	<p>As summer ended and the United States headed into the fall and winter, doctors were worried Americans would see a "twindemic" -- a situation in which both flu and COVID-19 spread at the same time.</p> <p>But experts told ABC News the country may now be facing the threat of a "tripledeemic" as doctors see an early rise in other pediatric respiratory viruses, particularly respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV.</p> <p>According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, respiratory illnesses are appearing earlier, and in more people, than in recent years.</p> <p>The federal health agency says there has also been early increases in flu activity across most of the U.S. with indications that this season could be much more severe than the previous two seasons.</p> <p>As of Monday afternoon, pediatric bed occupancy in the U.S. is the highest it's been in two years with 75% of the estimated 40,000 beds filled with patients, according to an ABC News analysis.</p> <p>COVID-19 infections have not yet begun to spike, CDC data shows. But in prior years, the virus has started to pick up around Thanksgiving.</p> <p>Experts said a combination of waning immunity to COVID and lack of exposure to other viruses, combined with close gatherings indoors, is fueling a "perfect storm."</p> <p>"Mostly the issue is there's low population immunity and kids are, once again, gathered again, and this is facilitating rapid spread of viruses like RSV," said Dr. John Brownstein, an epidemiologist and chief innovation officer at Boston Children's Hospital and an ABC News contributor. "And because of the sheer volume of infection, when you have that larger denominator, you have a situation where a portion of those kids are going to require hospital treatment. And because of that, our hospitals are spread thin, not only for bed capacity, but also for critical staffing, of those beds."</p> <p>He added, "So the combination of shortages, bed capacity and rising viral illness all make for an unfortunate perfect storm that we're seeing happen everywhere right now."</p> <p>Resurgence of respiratory viruses</p> <p>Over the last two years, there were more restrictions such as masking, social distancing, capacity limits and school closures. This meant fewer Americans were exposed to other viruses as well, including the flu and RSV.</p> <p>Now, with few to no mitigation measures in cities and states across the country, this is leading to a resurgence of these viruses.</p> <p>"That just leaves a lot of children, young children in particular, that have been born since March of 2020 who haven't yet encountered RSV infections," Dr. Larry Kocielek, medical director of Lurie Children's Hospital in Chicago, told ABC News. "And so that will increase the ability of the virus to spread and increase the number of children who will get infected."</p> <p>According to the CDC, flu test positivity rates have increased from 1.27% for the week ending Sept. 24 to 4.38% for the week ending Oct. 15, higher than usual for this time of year, experts said.</p>

Brownstein said another challenging issue for hospitals is staffing shortages.

"We have already an overworked and overstressed workforce, you have many that have left the health care industry because of burnout," he said. "And then on top of that, you have infection among health care staff."

Importance of vaccination

The doctors told ABC News it is vital for children to get vaccinated to prevent severe complications. Children can be hospitalized from any of these infections and those with underlying conditions are at the highest risk.

"If your child has not yet received the influenza vaccine, it is imperative that he or she [gets one] as soon as possible," Dr. Federico Laham, medical director of pediatric infectious disease at Orlando Health Arnold Palmer Hospital for Children, told ABC News. "It takes, as we know, a few weeks to mount a response. With some children who, especially after these past two years with very little flu circulation, the immune system gets a little bit lazy and forgetful. So it's important to 'remind' it."

Laham went on, "The same thing applies to COVID vaccine. Some children developed COVID early on in the pandemic and then didn't get the vaccine. We know that it works, we know that it's extremely safe."

In addition, experts say that parents may consider having their children wear masks and make sure they're practicing good hand hygiene, washing hands thoroughly with soap and water.

"The other thing that schools can do, and kids can do, is make sure you bring hand sanitizer with you to school so you can clean your hands and wipes to wipe down surfaces," Dr. Tom Murray, an associate professor of pediatrics in the section of infectious diseases at Yale University School of Medicine, told ABC News. "And again, common touch points, though the wiping down of contaminated surfaces is especially important with viruses like RSV."

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HEADLINE	10/26 Former China leader's ouster mystery
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/10/26/hu-jintao-mystery-china/
GIST	<p>China's annual Communist Party congress was a highly choreographed affair, designed to cement Xi Jinping's status as the unquestioned leader of China. But it was an apparently unscripted moment that really got people talking: The unexplained public ouster of former leader Hu Jintao.</p> <p>The incident, which saw Hu escorted away from the stage as the party congress wound down on Saturday, has led to fervent speculation among both seasoned China watchers and moonlighters.</p> <p>A new video released Monday by the Singaporean news agency CNA with a better view of the episode provided new clues, but no real answers, only adding to the confusion about what is going on at the upper levels of China's leadership.</p> <p>Whatever did happen, the incident offers further infuriating evidence of how opaque China's leadership is. Before Xi assumed power as China's leader in 2012, many assumed that he would be a quiet pragmatist like Hu, his predecessor as General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party in the decade before.</p> <p>But Xi instead ruthlessly cemented his own power in Beijing, abolishing presidential term limits and refusing to designate a successor. He led a crackdown in Xinjiang that the United Nations said could constitute crimes against humanity and stamped out dissent in Hong Kong.</p> <p>Some fear his ultimate ambition is to bring Taiwan under Beijing's control — an act of imperial hubris that could spark a global war.</p>

To many, Hu's exit from the party conference was a sign of Xi's callousness. Geopolitical analyst Ian Bremmer said Hu had [been publicly humiliated](#) because of “power politics,” while former Swedish prime minister Carl Bildt suggested Xi had shown no sympathy as his predecessor was forced out.

But there were others who reasoned that Hu, grey-haired at 79, had appeared frail — and that some kind of health episode could have sparked his exit, as claimed by Chinese state media. Bill Bishop of the [China-watching newsletter Sinocism](#) noted Hu's son, a senior party official himself, was in the audience. Purging one without the other seems unlikely, Bishop suggested.

Speaking [to the South China Morning Post](#), one unnamed Hong Kong-based China expert openly dismissed any talk of a “Stalinist purge” from Western voices and said it would make no sense for Hu or anyone else to challenge Xi on the final day of the party congress.

What binds all theories is a lack of firm information. Experts are basing their impressions on a handful of short clips from outside news outlets who were at the party. As my colleague [Christian Shepherd wrote](#) this weekend, Hu had been present at the opening ceremony and was expected to stay for the entire event. Instead, he was forced out mid-ceremony.

“Shortly after foreign journalists entered the hall, two suited men helped him to his feet and guided him off the stage, leaving an empty chair to the left of Xi,” Shepherd wrote, [adding that video](#) showed “a possibly hesitant or confused Hu first exchanging words with the men and Xi. After standing, he hovered in place, took a few slow steps, then stopped and turned to say something to Xi, who briefly nodded but remained looking ahead at the assembled delegates.”

Chinese state media has offered no clues as to what happened. It was only after widespread coverage of the incident that the Twitter [account of Xinhua News Agency tweeted](#) that Hu “was not feeling well during the session.”

The new footage from CNA adds one particularly notable detail: Hu had been looking at some documents on the table in front of him, before the current chairman of China's legislature, Premier Li Zhanshu, took them from his hand. It's at this point that Xi calls over the other men, who take Hu away.

But that document could be a vital clue or a red herring, depending on how you look at it. As one former [Chinese insider told the BBC](#), why would the party put a document in front of Hu if he was not allowed to look at it? “No one can explain it until there is more evidence of what was inside the file, or what was being said at the scene,” said Deng Yuwen, a former editor of party newspaper the Study Times.

Even if the speculation is off, the symbolism is powerful. In the past, it was widely expected that former leaders would continue to hold sway even after they had left office. The Post's William Wan reported from Beijing in 2012 that many expected Hu to exert influence over Xi through patronage and networks.

“Hu is trying to do with his successor what [former leader Jiang Zemin] did to Hu and what even earlier Deng Xiaoping did to Jiang,” an editor of a [party publication told The Post](#). “Each generation tries to hold sway over the next.”

Now, it looks clear that tradition has been broken. Hu's ouster on Saturday came as Xi's vision for the future was rubber-stamped by the 2,300 delegates at the 20th National Congress, with himself as leader for at least another five years. The era of two-term leaders appears to be over in China.

Meanwhile, China's once-powerful faction linked to the Communist Youth League — which includes both Hu and Li — was effectively cut out of power. Li, once considered a potential leader and a protege of Hu's, was ousted from not only the premiership but the powerful seven-person Politburo Standing Committee.

Reading the tea leaves is perhaps harder than ever in China. Xi has increased the pressure on Chinese civilians to fall in line, crushing not just dissent but reasoned debate. Outsiders have few resources to

understand the country. Western journalists are severely limited in what they can do in the country, while [public data is delayed](#).

Even mighty Western spy agencies have a hard time understanding what is going on in the country, as the inconclusive U.S.-led push to understand the [origins of covid-19 has shown](#). Ironically, the [massive crackdown on CIA informants](#) that crippled U.S. operations in the country began in 2010 — the last days of Hu’s China.

In many ways, it’s similar to the problems faced by Russia-watchers during the Soviet Union. With little outside information, Kremlinology [were forced to create](#) “absolute certainties on the basis of cloudy figures swirling in [their] crystal balls,” in the words of late historian Robert Conquest. And yet most missed the coming collapse of Russian Communism during the 1980s.

Pekingologists risk a similar miscalculation when looking at Hu’s fate. “In the end, how you interpret that moment depends partly on how you interpret China’s political system,” Rory Truex, an expert on Chinese politics at Princeton, wrote for [the Atlantic this week](#).

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HEADLINE	10/26 Russia hasty call-up: draftees without gear
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/russias-chaotic-draft-leaves-some-out-in-cold-without-gear/
GIST	<p>The mobilized reservists that Russian President Vladimir Putin visited last week at a firing range southeast of Moscow looked picture-perfect.</p> <p>Kremlin video of the young men headed for the war in Ukraine showed them in mint-condition uniforms, equipped with all the gear needed for combat: helmets, bulletproof vests and sleeping bags. When Putin asked if they had any problems, they shook their heads.</p> <p>That stands in stark contrast with the complaints circulating widely on Russian news outlets and social media of equipment shortages, poor living conditions and scant training for the new recruits.</p> <p>Since Putin announced the mobilization Sept. 21, independent media, human rights activists and those called up have painted a bleak picture of a haphazard, chaotic and ethnically biased effort to round up as many men as possible and push them quickly to the front lines, regardless of skill, training and equipment.</p> <p>Videos on Russian social networks showed conscripted men complaining of cramped, filthy accommodations, toilets overflowing with trash and a lack of food and medicine. Some showed men displaying rusty weapons.</p> <p>In one video, a group of draftees milled in a field, claiming they had been left there with no food or shelter. Other clips depicted men forced to sleep on bare benches or tightly packed on the floor.</p> <p>“We didn’t seek you out; you called us. Here, look at this! How long can this go on?” an exasperated voice says in a video.</p> <p>Putin’s decree on the partial mobilization didn’t outline the criteria for draftees or say how many would be called up. Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu has said it will affect only about 300,000 reservists with relevant combat or service experience.</p> <p>Conscription protests have been harshly put down, and tens of thousands of men fled Russia to neighboring countries to avoid being pressed into service.</p> <p>In the week after the decree, a young man opened fire on a recruitment officer in the Siberian city of Ust-Ilimsk, seriously wounding him. On Oct. 15, a shootout at a training camp in the southern Belgorod region killed 11 people and wounded 15 others. Enlistment offices and other administrative buildings also have been set on fire.</p>

It's now clear that in a country where almost all men under 65 are registered as part of the reserve, the mobilization process wasn't carried out carefully. There has been a flood of reports of call-up summonses being served to those with no military experience. Police rounded up men in the streets of Moscow and other cities, or raided hostels to apprehend guests of fighting age. Enlistment offices often skipped required health checks.

The hasty call-up will hardly achieve anything other than "slowing down the advances" of Ukrainian troops in the 8-month-old war, military analyst Pavel Luzin said in an interview.

Moscow is simply "prolonging the agony" in Ukraine, said Luzin, a visiting scholar at The Fletcher School at Tufts University.

Activists also say ethnic minorities in some regions were drafted in disproportionate numbers. Videos circulated of protests in the Muslim majority region of Dagestan, with relatives complaining that the area was providing more recruits than elsewhere.

Vladimir Budaev of the Free Buryatia Foundation told AP that Indigenous people in Russia's Far North and along the Mongolian border were "rounded up in their villages" in the drive.

In remote regions of Sakha and Buryatia, enlistment officers scoured the taiga for potential draftees, and "handed out summonses to anyone they met," he said.

According to Yekaterina Morland, an ethnic Buryat volunteer at the Asians of Russia Foundation, Buryatia has seen mobilization rates up to six times higher than Russia's European regions.

In the first two weeks of the call-up, authorities in some regions reported sending home hundreds of men who were drafted despite not meeting the criteria.

"The task of a military enlistment office is to recruit — recruit whoever they can grab," says Elena Popova, the coordinator of the Movement of Conscientious Objectors.

Putin himself publicly acknowledged "mistakes" in the process and demanded its improvement.

But even when the summonses went to those who had served in the army, it didn't necessarily mean that they had battlefield skills. Some former conscripts often don't get proper military training when they serve and instead are engaged in menial labor.

A woman who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because she feared reprisals said her 31-year-old husband did his mandatory service six years ago and had "no training at a firing range, or any combat drills in the field," but authorities tried to draft him anyway.

In fact, he had only held a weapon once, when they were taught how to strip down and reassemble an automatic rifle, she said. Mostly, she added, "they were sweeping (the compound), cleaning the snow."

Relatives of conscripts reported having to spend their own money on gear and basic necessities. Online groups were formed to raise funds for equipment.

One campaign was run by Kremlin-backed lawmaker and state TV host Yevgeny Popov, who said reservists in the Taman artillery division got shoes and clothes, but had "an acute shortage of drones, walkie-talkies, smartphones with maps (for gunners), binoculars, headlamps (and) power banks," he said.

Russian media reported multiple deaths of reservists in Ukraine, with their relatives telling news outlets that they had received very little training.

When asked by a reporter why several reservists had died in Ukraine only three weeks after being called up, Putin confirmed that training could last as few as 10 days and as many as 25.

Luzin, the military analyst, said Russia isn't able to train hundreds of thousands of men. "The army was not ready for mobilization. It never prepared for it," he said.

Putin has promised to finish the mobilization drive by November, when the regular fall draft is scheduled. Military experts and rights groups say enlistment offices and training camps can't process both at the same time, warning that the call-up may resume months later.

As of mid-October, 222,000 reservists have been recruited, Putin said. Whether it will be possible to enlist another 80,000 in the remaining two weeks is unclear.

Even though masses of Russian men are no longer fleeing the country and street protests have all but halted, there are still those resisting the effort.

Independent and opposition-leaning media have published instructions on how to avoid the call-up legally. Rights groups advise men not to sign the summons – which is required for it to be considered legally served – and not to go near enlistment offices.

Some men are seeking alternative civil service, a right that lawyers say is guaranteed by the constitution.

Kirill Berezin, 27, responded to a call-up notice shoved under the door of his St. Petersburg apartment by going to a enlistment office to apply for the alternative civil service, but he was taken to a military unit anyway, according to his friend, Marina Tsyganova.

Berezin, who has since been sent to a training facility in southern Russia, submitted a document to his commanders that said he "can't serve with weapons, can't kill people and help people who do it" because it was "contrary to my conscience."

Tsyganova told AP that she represented him in a St. Petersburg court, which last week rejected Berezin's lawsuit, saying only regular conscripts under 27 are eligible for alternative civil service. His defense team plans to appeal, she said, and at the very least, she hoped he won't be sent to Ukraine while the legal battle proceeds.

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HEADLINE	10/26 Extremist groups go local for elections
SOURCE	https://www.axios.com/2022/10/26/cities-midterms-elections-interference-militias-mayors-police-poll-extremists
GIST	<p>As Election Day draws near, mayors and police chiefs across the country are getting a new warning: Extremists have jettisoned their nationwide election intimidation strategy in favor of local efforts focused on neighborhood ballot boxes.</p> <p>Why it matters: Groups such as the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers are looking to sway the upcoming midterms in favor of their preferred candidates by signing up as poll workers and drop-box watchers.</p> <p>Driving the news: The U.S. Conference of Mayors held an event this week warning of decentralized election interference efforts targeting local voters, candidates and election workers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">"We've seen them dismantle some of their nationwide organizations," said Mary McCord, executive director of the Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection and a former Justice Department prosecutor."So the Proud Boys dismantle nationally in favor of state chapters — the Three Percenters did the same," she told the mayors.The change began after the 2020 election and grew more pronounced after the Jan. 6, 2021, U.S. Capitol attack.

State of play: "We're seeing similar types of threats today" as in the [2020 elections](#), McCord said — but now the attacks are coming from a "very ground-up, localized effort."

- For example: In 50 out of 67 Pennsylvania counties, election chiefs have left because of threats, harassment and intimidation against them and their families, McCord said.
- "We've seen a GOP candidate in Idaho have an effigy hung in his yard," she said. "We've seen a Democratic candidate in eastern Washington be shot with a BB gun while putting up signs."
- "These are very localized efforts. They're very threatening, and they continue to grow."

What extremists are saying: "Focus on county over country. Capture your local county, then several of them, then maybe your state," McCord said, quoting from a post on right-wing social network Gab.

In one tactic, extremists are signing up as poll watchers and workers, trying to use legitimate means to infiltrate and disrupt elections.

- A Proud Boy who worked at the polls in Miami in an August primary exhorted group members to do the same during the midterms, telling them: "We need to be at every polling station this November and have eyes and truth-telling patriots monitoring on the ground," McCord said.
- "Some of the responses were, 'It's time for mortal combat,'" she said. "That's the kind of rhetoric around some of the poll-watching activity."
- In one high-profile voter intimidation episode, armed [vigilantes](#) in tactical gear were seen watching over a Mesa, Arizona, mail-in ballot drop box.

Also girding for action: The "Constitutional Sheriffs" movement, a fringe [group](#) that believes sheriffs hold supreme legal power and can exercise it during elections.

One tactic that proved effective in 2020: Public officials issuing strong statements about how vigorously they would prosecute voter intimidation or harassment, McCord said.

- Part of the message should be that "armed activity around the polls that is intimidating won't be tolerated."
- 911 dispatchers should be told to prioritize calls about problems at the polls and send officers promptly, said Charles Ramsey, a former police chief in Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia, and currently an adviser to the U.S. Conference of Mayors.
- Police chiefs need to "make it very clear to our personnel that their particular political viewpoints do not matter," Ramsey said. "They have a job to do, and they're going to be expected to be held accountable for doing that job and doing it properly."

Backdrop: Election offices are [installing](#) bulletproof glass, bulking up on security and conducting active-shooter trainings.

- Rising threats are prompting a [shortage](#) of election workers — which extremists could use to their advantage.

The bottom line: Municipal and county leaders have a heavy responsibility to safeguard the upcoming midterms — which could serve as a dress rehearsal for the 2024 presidential election.

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HEADLINE	10/25 Palestinian militant group 'Den of Lions'
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/what-is-palestinian-militant-group-den-lions-2022-10-25/
GIST	<p>JERUSALEM, Oct 25 (Reuters) - Israeli forces killed a leader of the so-called "Den of Lions", a fast-rising Palestinian militant group from the city of Nablus on Tuesday in a targeted operation that set off one of the biggest gunfights seen in the West Bank in weeks.</p> <p>In a statement on Tuesday, the Israeli military said its forces had raided an apartment in the market area of the Old City that was used as an explosives manufacturing site, killing 31-year-old Wadi al-Houh, who it said was responsible for making pipe bombs and obtaining weapons.</p>

The Den of Lions emerged around a year ago in Nablus, where posters of its dead fighters, almost all young men posing with their automatic weapons and combat gear, are now plastered all over the narrow streets of the Old City and its covered market.

While members of the group have great prestige in the Old City, none of its leaders has established a wide profile outside their home town.

The group gained greater prominence across the West Bank following the killing in August of a 19-year-old militant called Ibrahim al-Nabulsi, whose death has been used as a rallying cause for disaffected youths in the Old City and refugee camps.

According to local Palestinian officials, the original core group of four young militants was mainly motivated by anger at the encroachments of Israeli settlers and confrontations with the Israeli military.

The group is not linked to the mainstream Palestinian factions or the deeply unpopular Palestinian Authority and does not appear to have any fully articulated political goals beyond fighting the Israeli occupation. But it may receive financial or logistical support from other groups, Palestinian officials say.

Clashes with settlers at Jacob's Tomb, a well-known monument and pilgrimage site in Nablus, were taken by members of the group as a particular challenge.

There is little reliable information on its numbers but one Palestinian official with good connections in the Old City of Nablus said there were perhaps 25 active gunmen, with a larger number of supporters outside the core group.

The Palestinian Authority, which has struggled to come up with a response to the group's wide popular support in Nablus, has tried to buy their weapons from them or integrate them into their security forces, according to Nablus governor Ibrahim Ramadan, but with little success.

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HEADLINE	10/25 Norway arrests researcher as a Russia spy
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/25/norway-arrests-brazilian-researcher-accused-of-spying-for-russia
GIST	<p>Norway's domestic security agency has arrested a man claiming to be a Brazilian academic whom it suspects of being a Russian spy.</p> <p>"We have requested that a Brazilian researcher at the University of Tromsø be expelled from Norway because we believe he represents a threat to fundamental national interests," the police security service (PST) deputy chief, Hedvig Moe, told the public broadcaster NRK.</p> <p>The security agency was concerned he "may have acquired a network and information about Norway's policy in the north", Moe said. "Even if this ... is not a threat to the security of the kingdom, we are worried it could be misused by Russia."</p> <p>Norway's domestic security agency has arrested a man claiming to be a Brazilian academic whom it suspects of being a Russian spy.</p> <p>"We have requested that a Brazilian researcher at the University of Tromsø be expelled from Norway because we believe he represents a threat to fundamental national interests," the police security service (PST) deputy chief, Hedvig Moe, told the public broadcaster NRK.</p> <p>The security agency was concerned he "may have acquired a network and information about Norway's policy in the north", Moe said. "Even if this ... is not a threat to the security of the kingdom, we are worried it could be misused by Russia."</p>

Norway said last week it had arrested a seventh Russian national suspected of illegally flying drones or taking photographs in restricted areas, mainly in the strategically sensitive far north of Norway.

Investigators believe the supposed researcher, who was detained on Monday in the Arctic city, was in Norway under a false name and identity working for one of Russia's intelligence services, NRK said. A local court ordered him to be held for four weeks.

Two staff members at the University of Tromsø who closely worked with the suspect said police had identified the man in question as José Assis Giammaria.

"I received a message late last night that police had detained Giammaria and searched his office," said Gunhild Hoogensen Gjorv, a professor in security studies at the university.

Gjorv said Giammaria had arrived at the university in December 2021 after contacting her with the request to conduct research at her department, which focuses on Arctic security.

"Giammaria emailed me, saying he was interested in learning more about security in the Arctic," Gjorv told the Guardian in a phone interview.

"He was recommended by a professor that I knew in Canada where he studied. We did the standard background check and called the references he listed," she said.

According to Gjorv as well as publicly available information, Giammaria graduated from the Centre for Military, Security and Strategic Studies at the University of Calgary in 2018.

Gjorv said Giammaria was not officially employed at the University of Tromsø but helped organise lectures and seminars while working on his "self-funded" research.

Gjorv believes Giammaria did not have access to classified information at the university.

"But he did get an understanding and insights into the sort of discussions and debates that we are having about security. He was at the place where important research was happening," she said, adding that "ironically" much of her department's research was focused on hybrid threats.

"What is interesting, if not ironic, is that we research how the civilian domain is targeted by hybrid threats. I did not expect I would be part of exactly what we research."

"It says something about what Russia thinks about our research."

A second colleague who has closely worked with Giammaria described him as "friendly" although they added that he was extremely protective of his privacy.

"He said he was against social media, and didn't even want to use WhatsApp, he only wanted to talk on Telegram," said the colleague, who asked for anonymity. "At the same time, he asked a lot of questions, including questions of personal nature as well."

The colleague said Giammaria had a "funny accent" that reminded him of Russian, but he could not "exactly place it".

Giammaria's behaviour had raised suspicion among colleagues at the university, the source said, and he once made a joke to Giammaria, asking him whether he was a spy.

Both Gjorv and the second colleague did not know Giammaria's exact age but said he looked to be in his "late 30s or early 40s."

The suspect's lawyer, [Thomas Hansen](#), told VG newspaper he denied any wrongdoing.

“He does not understand the accusations,” Hansen said of his client. “That is why he also asked to be released in court today.”

According to the court detention order, the Norwegian justice ministry notified the man last week that it believed he was “in Norway on assignment for the Russian authorities and may be a Russian citizen with false Brazilian papers”.

The court order added: “Nothing has subsequently emerged to indicate that the ministry’s assessment is not correct.”

Several Russian citizens have been held in Norway in recent weeks, including three men and a woman allegedly taking photos, who have since been released. Three others – one with four terabytes of photos and videos – were arrested with drones.

Norway, now western Europe’s largest gas supplier, is on high security alert after last month’s [suspected sabotage](#) of the Nord Stream pipelines off Sweden and Denmark.

In June, [Dutch intelligence revealed](#) that a Russian spy had tried and failed to secure an internship at the international criminal court (ICC) in The Hague using the false identity of a Brazilian citizen that he had built up over more than a decade.

Sergey Vladimirovich Cherkasov, 36, who is accused of being an agent of Russia’s GRU military intelligence, was arrested at Schiphol airport after flying to the Netherlands under the false identity of Viktor Muller Ferreira, 33.

In August, investigators [unmasked another GRU spy](#) by the name of Maria Adela Kuhfeldt Rivera, who allegedly spent a decade posing as a Peruvian jewellery designer and partied with Nato staff based in Naples.

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HEADLINE	10/25 Oligarchs obscure wealth in complex layers
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russian-oligarch-bridgewaters-sanctions-offshore-network-11665767178?mod=hp_trending_now_article_pos3
GIST	<p>A Silicon Valley laser startup that went public in February had a surprising investor: a Russian billionaire.</p> <p>The deal, routed through a series of offshore companies and a venture fund, let the oligarch, Alisher Usmanov, move more of his vast wealth into the West. The fund’s stake at the IPO was valued at \$175 million.</p> <p>Days later, Russia invaded Ukraine, and the U.S. sanctioned Mr. Usmanov as part of its effort to pressure Russian President Vladimir Putin.</p> <p>The investment in Quanergy Systems Inc. was made through a network of shell companies and middlemen used by Putin allies and others for years to move hundreds of millions of dollars out of Russia, according to documents including emails, investment offerings, public and private corporate records, shareholder registers and SEC filings.</p> <p>The scope of the network hasn’t been previously reported. It has also been used by relatives of Andrei Skoch, a member of Russia’s parliament, Sergei Chemezov, a former KGB associate of Mr. Putin whose companies sell arms to the Russian military, and Dmitry Peskov, Mr. Putin’s spokesman, as well as Kremlin-backed VTB Bank, which is often involved in major government deals.</p>

All are now blacklisted by the U.S. and the European Union, along with [many other oligarchs and companies](#).

The network's intricate layers are making it harder for the West to [track assets and enforce the sanctions](#), a key economic weapon in the effort to end Russia's aggression in Ukraine. A multitude of partial ownership stakes also makes it [legally more complicated to crack down](#) on companies.

The layers of investment helped obscure Mr. Usmanov's links to an Airbus A340 jet valued at more than \$350 million that departed Munich for Uzbekistan soon after the EU banned flights by Russian-owned planes and hours after the oligarch's name was added to EU sanctions lists.

The jet's listed owner was an offshore company. "The attribution of the aircraft to Mr. Usmanov was not clear at the time in question," said a spokeswoman for German transportation authorities. If it had been clear, "European airspace would have been closed to the aircraft and the aircraft would not have been able to take off," she said.

At the core of the Russian money network is a firm in the Isle of Man, a wind-swept self-governing island in the Irish Sea, called Bridgewaters.

The firm has helped structure a corporate empire for its clients that has included investments in U.S. technology companies such as [Meta Platforms](#) Inc., [Twitter](#) and [Airbnb](#) Inc.; investment in a company that allegedly sells surveillance equipment to the Russian government and real estate around Europe, according to the documents reviewed by The Wall Street Journal.

To trace the Russian assets, the Journal scoured thousands of corporate documents, many made public in recent years in major leaks of financial documents from offshore services firms, including the [Panama](#), [Pandora](#) and [Paradise Papers](#).

Those documents, which began being published in 2016 and have resulted in hundreds of articles in the media about international tax evasion and money laundering schemes, were shared by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists and German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung with the Journal.

The Journal also used corporate filings and records from about 20 countries to track the network's companies back to Russia.

The reviewed documents don't show that assets moved out of Russia via the Bridgewaters network after sanctions were levied. Instead, they reveal how Russian-linked firms have been able to remain invested in Western companies, despite a global crackdown.

SEC documents filed in October said about 16% of Quanergy, the laser startup with the February IPO, is owned by a San Francisco-based venture-capital fund called Rising Tide V LLC, which is backed by a Bridgewaters fund that Mr. Usmanov invests in. Quanergy said in SEC filings that Mr. Usmanov held a significant stake in Rising Tide V.

Complex layers

Bridgewaters said it has acted lawfully, and its new managing director, Mark Veale, who took over in November, said the company has undergone a complete overhaul recently and dropped several client relationships in the past year. He declined to say which ones, citing client confidentiality, or to disclose any specifics about clients or deals.

"I can't go back and correct anything—if there were any mistakes in the past," he said. But today, he said, the firm does everything by the book.

"We haven't been involved in evading sanctions," he said. "Nothing happens from this office with anyone who may be subject to sanctions without all the appropriate documentation."

Mr. Veale said that Bridgewaters had had a “concentration at various times” of Russian clientele, and that disentangling relationships with people now under sanctions isn’t straightforward.

“It’s not as simple as you stop doing it,” he said. “The same ownership group, one part could get caught and another part may not be, there could be restrictions on certain activities and not others.”

A spokesman for Mr. Usmanov said he is a self-made man who has never tried to hide his assets and isn’t tied to the Kremlin. “We categorically reject the claim that Mr. Usmanov used” a network of shell companies and middlemen to move rubles out of Russia, he said. “Nothing of the kind ever took place.”

Bridgewaters deals are managed through complex layers of partnerships, limited liability companies, loans and holding companies in global tax havens built with the help of multinational law firms and elite financial institutions, including [Credit Suisse Group](#) AG, according to public records and the documents.

A spokesman for Credit Suisse said he couldn’t comment on potential client relationships and said the bank takes action against accounts used for illicit activities.

The U.S. Treasury is offering millions in rewards for information about the wealth of sanctioned Russians, including those in the network and many others who have been blacklisted since the Ukraine invasion, and the Justice Department has launched a “KleptoCapture” task force to seize luxury real estate, private jets, yachts and other assets.

The Treasury said it was “certainly tracking” Bridgewaters but didn’t provide further details. The department’s sanctions enforcement group, the Office of Foreign Assets Control, didn’t know about Mr. Usmanov’s stake in Quanergy, according to a person familiar with the matter.

Quanergy and Rising Tide V didn’t respond to requests for comment.

Vast wealth among oligarchs grew out of the collapse of the Soviet Union, as state-owned assets flowed into the hands of men close to President Boris Yeltsin and later his successor, Mr. Putin.

Many Russian oligarchs structured investments through Isle of Man companies because of the island’s low taxes, limited bureaucracy and past policies of allowing company owners to remain private. Although the island depends on the U.K. for defense and its foreign policy, it sets its own laws.

[British lawmakers](#) and [financial-transparency experts](#) say the island’s financial system, like that of the British Virgin Islands or the Cayman Islands, is an offshore haven that draws people seeking to conceal wealth and avoid tax, facilitating corruption and helping hide ill-gotten gains.

A representative for the Isle of Man government said its sanctions mirror those in the U.K. and that it has begun tracking company owners and making that information available to law enforcement. It said it has frozen about £2 million in Russian assets, and deregistered 49 boats and 22 aircraft, including the Airbus linked to Mr. Usmanov.

Gazprom funds

Bridgewaters, founded in 1996, is one of many companies in the Isle of Man performing the dry functions of international business. (It isn’t related to Bridgewater Associates, the U.S. hedge-fund firm.) It has acted for years as a corporate services provider and trust business, performing due diligence, registering companies, providing locally based directors, managing trusts and helping structure international investment strategies.

In recent years, much of its business appears to have come from people with close ties to the Kremlin and their associates, a Journal analysis of more than 300 companies and trusts administered by the firm found. Some of the Russian-linked companies created or managed by Bridgewaters are no longer connected to the firm.

The documents reviewed by the Journal show the Russian ties date back at least to the mid-2000s.

In one early deal, an Isle of Man banker described how Mr. Usmanov, who at the time was chief executive of the investment arm of Gazprom, the majority state-owned energy giant that is now under sanctions, and a partner would fund their metals business with money from Gazprom.

“I went to Bridgewater last week to sign up the Russians,” the banker wrote in a January 2007 message included in the documents, referring to a plan by the partners to open a bank account for one of their companies.

Sketches of the banker’s understanding of the planned financing show lines from Gazprom and its investment arm pointing to the men’s steel and mining conglomerate, called Metalloinvest, and a network of holding, distribution and trading companies scattered around the world. Payments for the iron would go to accounts at Swiss investment bank Credit Suisse in the name of a company administered by Bridgewater.

“Please note,” the banker, who worked at a subsidiary of an Irish bank, wrote, “Monies ultimately stem from Gazprom Investment Holdings.”

A month after the meeting, a company named on the banker’s chart, a British Virgin Islands firm called Kanton Services Ltd., entered into a \$350 million loan agreement with a subsidiary of Gazprom’s investment arm, according to the documents.

By 2009, Metalloinvest’s international trading operation was generating as much as \$3 billion a year in sales, company documents show.

Kanton’s listed owner, Leon Semenenko, said the company was mainly used to trade stocks and that Mr. Usmanov was the “de facto controller of the company.” He said Kanton received loans from Gazprom’s investment arm. He said he didn’t recall any of that money being used to finance Metalloinvest and that such a move would have been outside the scope of Kanton’s normal activity.

Mr. Usmanov’s spokesman, Grigory Levchenko, said the oligarch built his business, including Metalloinvest, from scratch or with assets purchased at fair market rates. “We categorically reject any unsubstantiated claim that Metalloinvest could have been financed with funds from Gazprom Investholding,” he said. He said the oligarch never used Kremlin-backed loans or any other support from the Russian authorities in his businesses, and had no control of or affiliation with Kanton.

Gazprom Investholding, the investment arm, didn’t respond to requests for comment on any of its deals.

An email from 2011 included in the documents suggests that Mr. Usmanov became the owner of Bridgewater that year.

A British accountant, in a conversation about business for Mr. Usmanov, told a lawyer that his Russian client “has now bought a trust company in the Isle of Man (called Bridgewater),” according to the email, which was first reported by the BBC.

Mr. Veale, the Bridgewater managing director, said the accountant, Richard Prosser, was mistaken. He said that the two buyers of the firm that year were a corporate services firm in Cyprus and a company in the Isle of Man owned by Swiss banker Matthias Dieter Bolliger, and that they didn’t act at Mr. Usmanov’s direction.

Mr. Usmanov denied through his spokesman that he ever owned or controlled Bridgewater.

“I can’t say anything about that,” Mr. Prosser said, when asked about the email suggesting Mr. Usmanov bought Bridgewater. “I’m not saying yes, and I’m not saying no.”

Both Gainfield Holdings Ltd., the Cyprus corporate services firm, and Mr. Bolliger were tied to Mr. Usmanov, according to company documents and internet records.

Mr. Bolliger, who had earlier worked on a steelmaker deal with the oligarch, wrote to Bridgewaters from email addresses belonging to several of the oligarch's companies, according to the documents. The Cyprus company's website, meanwhile, used several IP addresses registered to Mr. Usmanov's management firm, a Journal analysis of internet records found.

George Sergides, the listed owner of Gainfield, said he didn't act "on behalf or at the instruction of any third party."

Mr. Bolliger didn't respond to requests for comment. Lawyers for Mr. Bolliger in the past have said he never controlled Bridgewaters on behalf of any other individual.

Of Mr. Bolliger's role in Mr. Usmanov's organization, Mr. Levchenko said: "A person can work for a corporation, be employed as an adviser, consultant or director, and also own a business of their own."

Mr. Veale said Mr. Bolliger bought out Mr. Sergides's stake in 2019. He said Mr. Bolliger still owns Bridgewaters but no longer controls it, after an investigation by the Isle of Man financial regulator in November barred him from doing so.

The regulator also fined Bridgewaters for failing to keep tabs on risks posed by its customers and banned some employees, including its head of compliance and its money laundering reporting officer.

The regulator declined to discuss details of the Bridgewaters case, citing confidentiality agreements and regulatory disclosure rules.

Under Isle of Man law, companies such as Bridgewaters are responsible for conducting due diligence on clients and disclosing any political or legal risks.

An ownership arrangement with Mr. Usmanov would have been a conflict of interest for Bridgewaters, said David Zweighaft, a former Justice Department investigator now working in New York as a forensic accountant who reviewed the structure of Bridgewaters for the Journal. "You have the fox guarding the henhouse," he said.

Silicon Valley investments

One destination of Russian funds in 2011 was the venture-capital firm DST Global, co-founded by Russian-born Israeli investor Yuri Milner, which held stakes in tech firms including Facebook.

Much of the money came through Kanton, the company named by the banker in the Metalloinvest arrangement. That firm, which continued to receive loans from Gazprom's investment arm, was a backer of the DST Global fund DST Global II in 2011.

Kanton had two principal sources of cash, said its listed owner, Mr. Semenenko: Mr. Usmanov and Gazprom's investment arm, whose loans he said were secured by stocks owned by Mr. Usmanov. He said he couldn't break down how much of the Gazprom money wound up in Kanton's DST Global investments. "The money is fungible," he said. "I didn't differentiate where it came from."

Other money came from Kremlin-controlled VTB Bank, which used specially created Bridgewaters companies to invest about \$300 million through DST Global into Twitter and Chinese retailer JD.com, according to public records in the Isle of Man, SEC filings and people familiar with the matter.

VTB didn't respond to requests for comment. The bank has previously said its DST Global investments were among several high-tech deals it was involved in at the time.

A 2018 report commissioned by one of Gazprom Investholding's subsidiaries said none of its loans were used to finance investments in Facebook.

In 2015, Bridgewater set up a private fund that held stakes in various tech companies. For a minimum investment of \$100,000, the fund gave investors access to DST Global II, which included a stake in Airbnb, the documents show. Some of Kanton's holdings were rolled into this fund, Mr. Semenenko said.

It was through this special fund, called Global Technology Investments, that Mr. Usmanov's money was later invested in Quanergy, the laser startup, said Mr. Levchenko, the oligarch's spokesman.

A DST Global representative said the firm hadn't taken on any Russian investors since 2011 and didn't know about any loans from Gazprom or investors in GTI. The firm said publicly in 2017 that "relations were much better" between the U.S. and Russia at the time the previous deals were struck. This month, Mr. Milner said on Twitter that he and his family had renounced their Russian citizenship this summer.

Construction project

The Bridgewater network was used in 2013 for a \$130 million loan involving Mr. Usmanov and relatives of Mr. Skoch, the Russian billionaire parliamentarian, and of Mr. Chemezov, the former KGB agent and chief of Russia's largest producer of military equipment, according to the documents, Russian court records and Russian media reports. The dollar-based deal involved a construction project in Russia and companies in the British Virgin Islands.

Mr. Chemezov was blacklisted by the Treasury in 2014, and Mr. Skoch in 2018.

In 2017, after details about the lender were revealed in the Panama Papers, the debt was shifted to another company and hasn't been repaid, according to Russian court judgments.

Bridgewater also administered a British Virgin Islands investment company co-owned by Mr. Chemezov's Rostec defense conglomerate, which is also under sanctions. Among that firm's holdings was a Russian telecommunications company that marketed surveillance capabilities to the Russian government, according to documents published by WikiLeaks in 2017.

Rostec, Mr. Chemezov and Mr. Skoch didn't respond to requests for comment.

Bridgewater had a connection to Mr. Putin's spokesman, Mr. Peskov. In 2014, the firm ordered the creation of a company to hold funds in excess of \$1 million in the name of his girlfriend, Tatiana Navka, a champion Russian ice dancer, the documents show. The couple married the following year.

Ms. Navka and Mr. Peskov didn't respond to a request for comment. Ms. Navka, who is also under sanctions, denied in the past any links to the company.

Several Bridgewater companies owned mansions near the German lakeside town of Tegernsee, about an hour south of Munich, according to information published by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, an international network of investigative journalists. Mr. Usmanov visits the town to get treatment for eye problems and lives in the properties while there, according to Mr. Levchenko and a local politician.

The politician, Thomas Tomaschek, who organized an antiwar demonstration he said was aimed at the oligarch after the Ukraine invasion, said Mr. Usmanov visits the small lakeside town three to four times a year with bodyguards.

In September, German media reported that [one of the villas was among two dozen homes and offices raided by German police](#) in connection with an investigation of suspected sanctions violations.

	<p>Mr. Levchenko said the oligarch doesn't own any of the homes but simply pays to rent them. He added that Mr. Usmanov's companions in Tegernsee weren't bodyguards but guests and assistants who helped Mr. Usmanov with a heavy workload that included charities and his job at the time as president of the International Fencing Federation.</p> <p>Mr. Levchenko also said that the Airbus that took off from Munich "does not belong to Mr. Usmanov and is not under his control" and that the sanctions against Mr. Usmanov wouldn't have stopped it from departing the German airport.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/25 Ukraine continues advance against Russia
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/10/25/bakhmut-kherson-ukraine-war-russia/
GIST	<p>Ukrainian forces continued their advance against the Russian military in the southern Kherson region Tuesday, pushed back Russian mercenaries from Bakhmut in eastern Donetsk, and gained new momentum in Luhansk, where they seized a key highway between the towns of Kreminna and Svatove.</p> <p>On a day of heavy fighting and fast-moving developments across multiple combat zones, the Ukrainians appeared to extend their recent successes in recapturing occupied territories and pushing Moscow's troops into retreat in areas that President Vladimir Putin has claimed now belong to Russia.</p> <p>Away from the battlefield, the Kremlin continued to push a claim, asserted repeatedly without evidence, that Kyiv was preparing to use a "dirty bomb," a weapon that combines conventional explosives with radioactive material — an accusation that was dismissed by the United States and other Western nations.</p> <p>U.S. officials said that Moscow's allegations raised a risk that Russia itself was planning to carry out a radiation attack, potentially as a pretext to justify further escalation of the war amid its continuing territorial setbacks.</p> <p>In a statement Tuesday, Ukraine's nuclear energy operator, Energoatom, issued a similar warning, citing the Russian military's control over the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant in Enerhodar. "Energoatom assumes that such actions of the occupiers may indicate that they are preparing a terrorist act using nuclear materials and radioactive waste stored at the ZNPP site," the statement said.</p> <p>The renewed fears of some kind of radiation attack added to the ominous sense that Putin's war in Ukraine is growing even more deadly and dangerous as each side seeks to redraw facts on the ground before winter.</p> <p>Ukraine has been pushing hard for further territorial gains, while Russia this month began a relentless bombing campaign against Ukraine's energy system, using missiles and attack drones in an apparent bid to plunge the country into cold and darkness, and potentially compensate for battlefield losses.</p> <p>As Ukraine continued to make gains, pro-Kremlin military bloggers and analysts confirmed new setbacks for Russia's forces Tuesday, including in Luhansk, the easternmost occupied region of Ukraine, where Russia has had its firmest grip.</p> <p>"The Ukrainian army has resumed its counteroffensive in the Luhansk direction," the pro-Russian WarGonzo project said in its daily military update, adding that Ukrainian forces took control of a key highway between the Luhansk towns of Svatove and Kreminna.</p> <p>"The Russian artillery is actively working on the left bank of Zherebets river and is trying to stop the transfer of reinforcements to the enemy but the situation is very difficult," WarGonzo said.</p> <p>In the Donetsk region, the Wagner paramilitary force, controlled by St. Petersburg businessman Yevgeniy Prigozhin, appeared to be getting pushed back from Bakhmut, where the mercenaries had spent weeks pummeling the city but making small gains. Military experts said there was little strategic value in seizing</p>

Bakhmut, but Prigozhin seems to see a chance to claim a political prize, while regular Russian military units lose ground in other combat zones.

Ukrainian forces have recaptured a concrete factory on Bakhmut's eastern outskirts, the Washington-based Institute for the Study of War reported Monday. On Sunday, Prigozhin acknowledged the slow pace of Wagner's effort, saying the mercenaries were gaining only "100-200 meters a day."

"Our units are constantly meeting with the most fierce enemy resistance, and I note that the enemy is well prepared, motivated, and works confidently and harmoniously," Prigozhin said in a statement published by his catering company's press service. "This does not prevent our fighters from moving forward, but I cannot comment on how long it will take."

In the southern Kherson region, one of the four Moscow claimed to have annexed, Russian forces appeared to be preparing to defend the city of Kherson, amid speculation they would pull back to the eastern side of the Dnieper River, ceding crucial ground.

The Ukrainian military said in its Tuesday operational [update](#) that Russian troops were setting up "defensive positions" along the east bank of the Dnieper and leaving small passages for a potential retreat from the west bank.

Speculation on whether Moscow is preparing to abandon Kherson has been circulating for weeks after Ukrainian forces made steady breakthroughs in the southern direction.

"I don't know all the nuances and plans of the command, but I don't exclude the surrender of Kherson as from a military point of view its defense at the moment could turn into a rout," a popular Russian military blogger, who writes under the moniker Zapiski Veterana, wrote in a Telegram post. "But I think that if a decision was made in Moscow to fight until victory, then there is nothing tragic in the surrender of Kherson because this war is here for a long time."

Moscow may not have a choice. "The Russian position in upper Kherson Oblast is, nevertheless, likely untenable," the Institute for the Study of War said.

Kremlin-installed officials have been forcing residents to evacuate from the west bank of the Dnieper while claiming without evidence that Kyiv is preparing attacks on the Kakhovka hydroelectric power plant, as well as the "dirty bomb" allegations.

The United States, France and Britain accused Moscow of using allegations of a dirty bomb as a pretext for escalation, and they warned that Putin's government would face additional punitive action by the West.

On Tuesday, the Kremlin called Washington's distrust of Russia's claims "an impermissible and frivolous approach."

After a two-week bombing campaign, in which Moscow systemically targeted energy infrastructure, Kyiv is increasingly concerned about civilians enduring a bitter winter. Ukrainian officials have spent the past few weeks pressing European officials for more sophisticated weapons, particularly the advanced air defense systems required to fend off Russia's aerial assaults.

The country also faces an urgent cash crunch, with officials raising questions about how Ukraine will secure funding to keep services running through the brutal weeks and months ahead. An early October projection from the World Bank suggested Ukraine's economy will contract by 35 percent this year.

On Tuesday, Germany and the European Union hosted a conference in Berlin about reconstruction, though the conversation seemed especially premature given Russian attacks that yield fresh destruction each day.

President Volodymyr Zelensky has said Ukraine needs about \$38 billion in emergency economic aid for next year alone. But while top officials regularly trumpet the E.U.'s support for Ukraine, there are questions about short- and long-term follow-through.

Even as European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has touted plans to help Ukraine through 2023, for instance, E.U. officials acknowledge delays in delivering to Kyiv the roughly \$9 billion in loans pledged earlier this year.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet L. Yellen pressed European counterparts in recent weeks to step up financial assistance to Kyiv and has indirectly questioned the decision to offer loans rather than grants.

"We are calling on our partners and allies to join us by swiftly disbursing their existing commitments to Ukraine and by stepping up in doing more," Yellen said this month. In a video address to a European Council summit in Brussels last week, Zelensky called out European leaders for failing to deliver much-needed economic assistance quickly enough.

"Thank you for the funds that have already been allocated," Zelensky said. "But a decision has not yet been made on the remaining \$6 billion from this package — which is critically needed this year."

"It is in your power," he continued, "to reach a principled agreement on the provision of this assistance to our state today already."

With existing needs unmet, some wonder how seriously to take the E.U.'s promises of an effort of Marshall Plan proportions. A Q&A published by Germany's Group of Seven presidency ahead of Tuesday's conference noted that the event would not include a "pledging segment." Instead, the purpose is to "underline that the international community is united and resolute in its support to Ukraine."

In private conversations, some E.U. diplomats raised questions about whether the bloc ought to be allocating resources for the reconstruction of a country that is still very much at war, particularly given Europe's own energy and economic crises.

As von der Leyen spoke in Berlin on Tuesday, the focus in Brussels was very much on efforts to find common ground among the E.U.'s own member states on emergency energy measures.

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HEADLINE	10/25 Flood-prone communities in tough choices
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2022/10/25/flood-zone-homes-buyouts/
GIST	<p>SOCASTEE, S.C. — On the day she would finally move to higher ground, Terri Straka awoke in the neighborhood where she had lived for three decades, but a place steadily becoming less recognizable.</p> <p>"No Trespassing" signs adorned the lawns of other flood-prone houses whose owners had already taken government buyouts. Storage pods sat in the driveways of neighbors who would soon follow. In one yard, a sign warned would-be house hunters, "Don't buy in the swamp."</p> <p>"It's like a death," Straka, 52, said as she surveyed the two packed U-Haul trucks parked out front. "I didn't have any intentions of leaving. This place is my heritage."</p> <p>The transformation unfolding in this one corner of South Carolina embodies the quandary that a growing number of communities around the nation face — and will face in the years ahead.</p> <p>In this stretch of the Mid-Atlantic, waters are rising at among the fastest rates in the world — a U.S. government station in Myrtle Beach has recorded nearly 10 inches of sea level rise since the late 1950s, and the trend has accelerated in recent years. Add to that more intense hurricanes, torrential rainstorms, feverish development that alters water flow and other factors, and more and more communities like this one find themselves in the path of floodwaters.</p>

Already, according to one [seminal study](#) that examined voluntary buyouts between 1989 and 2017, the government has paid for more than 43,000 buyouts of flood-prone properties across 49 states and more than 1,100 counties.

Those numbers are set to grow.

In places such as Socastee, where some residents were flooded not only during Hurricanes Joaquin in 2015, Matthew in 2016 and Florence in 2018, but also during no-name storms and heavy rains, local officials eventually sought federal funding to help those who wanted to relocate, and to return the land to green space in perpetuity.

But even that effort has proven contentious and slow. For those who have sought buyouts, the hot housing market and [soaring interest rates](#) have made it difficult to find comparable places to move.

Other homeowners nearby have received state resilience money or help from nonprofit groups to elevate their homes and stay put. Others have rejected either option. Many residents, once assured they didn't live in a high-risk area, now struggle to afford the rising cost of flood insurance.

The situation illustrates how there are seldom easy answers when it comes to dealing with homes that face repeated flooding, even as more places face the likelihood of such catastrophes in the years ahead.

Buyouts and home elevations can alter the character of communities, impact property values and sow division among neighbors. But the prospect of chronic flooding brings its own form of upheaval, mental anguish and financial strain.

For Straka, moving day brought a rush of emotions.

Among them was relief to be escaping her neighborhood perched along the Intracoastal Waterway — five miles inland from [Myrtle Beach's](#) glittering oceanfront strip — where she and others had flooded again and again in recent years.

There was also sadness at leaving behind a community where her parents still lived and a home, now destined for demolition, where she had raised her three children and befriended other families.

But with each flood, and each tumultuous rebuilding that followed, it became harder for Straka to justify staying. "We can't withstand it, financially or emotionally," she said on the morning of her move. "Nothing is going to change. It's only going to get worse."

Sitting under a clear sky, with the morning sun glinting off the serene waterway nearby, she said she understood why many of her neighbors don't want to endure the headaches that come with a buyout.

But she also believes that over time, climate change will leave some with little choice — that the storms will return, and the waters will rise again.

"I don't think people are ready for it," she said. "But it's coming, and it's going to get worse."

'This is unmanaged retreat'

In many ways, the affected neighborhoods of Socastee seem utterly normal — home to working-class families and retirees, the majority of whom live in modest, low-slung houses laid out along tidy suburban streets.

But it's also clear here that flooding — the memory of it, the aftermath of it, the anticipation of it — has become an inescapable part of life.

On a recent morning, employees from a demolition company walked one street with clipboards, surveying houses that had undergone buyouts and would soon be torn down. Nearby, a man from the Horry County government was hanging fliers on certain homes to remind their owners that there was still time for people affected by “repetitive loss” flooding to seek a buyout.

“Funding is limited, and applications will be processed in the order they are received,” it read.

On some front porches, the faint water line from Hurricane Florence remains. Some residents continue to rebuild from the last time they flooded, as recently as last year. More than a few worry what their street will look like as more people leave, about the disruption demolitions will bring, about the police and firefighters who use now-empty houses for training exercises.

Rob Young views the situation in Socastee as a microcosm of the issues facing many communities — and of the uneven ways that governments often respond.

“It’s a great case study that exhibits several problems with how we handle human vulnerability and flooding in the United States,” said Young, a professor of geology at Western Carolina University and director of the [Program for the Study of Developed Shorelines](#).

Historically, he said, much of the money that the federal government allocates to protecting properties threatened by floods and rising seas has gravitated toward wealthier, waterfront areas with highly valued properties. These places tend to get the most protection, and they are often first in line for aid to rebuild.

Communities such as Socastee that often lie inland tend to receive far less funding to make them more resilient to disasters. More often, Young said, any financial relief tends to come later in the form of buyouts — and sometimes only after residents clamor for help.

“The system is pretty broken,” he said. “We tend to help them only after they have been wounded and damaged.”

Young believes county officials are trying their best to deal with an unenviable situation and give homeowners the ability to leave. But buyouts inevitably take a long time, don’t provide a systemic solution to flooding and impact those who remain.

“Some would look at that and say, ‘This is managed retreat.’ I look at it and I say, ‘This is unmanaged retreat, not managed retreat.’ There’s no long-term plan,” said Young, who last year worked with Horry County to alter its existing flood maps.

“When you have to do it this way, you have lasting injuries, both for the people who have been waiting years for a buyout, but also for the people who are left behind,” he said.

Socastee is hardly the first community to experiment with buyouts, nor will it be the last.

In Louisiana, residents of [Isle de Jean Charles](#) are among the first communities the federal government is working to resettle en masse in the face of rising seas. New Jersey has [overseen](#) buyouts of hundreds of properties since Superstorm Sandy in 2012. Harris County in Texas has [undertaken](#) more than 800 buyouts since Hurricane Harvey in 2017, and approved 1,600 more. Many smaller communities have followed a similar path, though on a smaller scale.

As more people in more places face repeat flooding and potential displacement, the country must do more to prepare for what is coming and to treat different communities equitably, said Stephen Eisenman, co-founder of Anthropocene Alliance, a coalition of [front-line communities](#) experiencing the impacts of extreme weather and climate change.

One key change, said Harriet Festing, the group's executive director, is for leaders to stop allowing construction in vulnerable areas, which threatens to put more people in harm's way.

"There's so much money going into development in flood-prone areas," she said. "You see everywhere around you the exact opposite of what you know has to happen."

'Mother Nature is telling us something'

In October 2018, Sen. Lindsey O. Graham (R-S.C.) came to Starcreek Circle in Socastee to survey the devastating flooding that Hurricane Florence had inflicted.

"Mother Nature is telling us something, and we need to listen," [he told](#) the collection of assembled homeowners. He urged those who had flooded repeatedly to consider leaving, and said government funding could help move them to higher ground.

Four years and more flooding later, the residents of Starcreek Circle have taken different paths in the wake of those pleas.

Some, such as Keith and Tyra Moore, are in the process of applying for a buyout. The couple rebuilt largely themselves after Florence forced three feet of water in the house. They replaced drywall and insulation, painted ceilings, installed new doors and windows.

They had hoped to raise their well-kept home and spend their retirement there. But after they learned that part of their property now sits in a floodway, they decided it was time to go. "We're always just waiting for that next storm, that next flood," Tyra said.

Keith jokes with friends and relatives about their predicament: "We used to live on the creek, then we were in the creek, and now we are up the creek."

Meanwhile, their neighbors on either side have no plans to leave.

"We are going to take our chances with the flooding. We will just deal with it as it comes," said Connie Wardien, who has lived with her husband, Wayne, for three decades in a home that has flooded twice since 2016, displacing them each time.

"We don't think the buyouts are going to be worth our while, especially the way the market is now," she said. She pointed to the pecan and pear trees they had planted, spoke of the children they had raised who still live nearby. "We have loved this place. ... Where are we going to go?"

Jim and Gina Hudson feel much the same. His father built their two-story home in the 1990s, but they had to gut the first floor after Florence and were displaced for nearly nine months.

"This is our investment," Jim, who is from Horry County, said one recent afternoon. "This is home."

"We are just trusting the Lord that it won't happen like that again," Gina said, "and dealing with it if it does."

Elizabeth Tranter, Horry County's director of community development and grants, sees the buyout program as a lifeline to those who want it. "I view our job as providing an option to people who may not perceive they have many options," she said.

Tranter said the series of bad storms in recent years left the community "just exhausted" from the constant threat of flooding. That reality, coupled with the fact that some residents held a public protest in 2020 to demand funding for buyouts, led officials to seek money from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The county eventually was awarded money to buyout up to 61 properties, with an initial cap of \$250,000 each. The buyout program opened for applications in July 2021. As of Friday, the county has acquired 29 homes, with eight more under contract. More applications are in the pipeline, Tranter said.

“Right now, I’m still seeing a great deal of interest,” she said. “I hope that some of the families who are seeking a new start are able to get that, and are able to locate to a place they feel comfortable.”

Linda and Jim Fraboni jumped at the chance for that new start. After flooding roughly a dozen times in their nearly 25 years on Starcreek Circle, the couple wanted out. But, Linda said, “We felt stuck.”

They refused to sell to an unsuspecting buyer — “You can’t do that to people,” Jim says — but disclosing the risks meant the house was virtually unsellable. When the buyout offer came, they applied and encouraged their daughter and son-in-law down the street to do the same.

The process took longer than expected, but the couple — now both retired — closed in June and left South Carolina behind. They now live on nearly 2 acres in Tennessee, surrounded by woods.

“It was a blessing for us,” Linda said on a recent fall day, as Hurricane Ian barreled toward South Carolina. If they were still in Socastee, she said, they would be frantically packing up keepsakes and bracing for another flood.

Instead, they were watching the autumn leaves change color.

“We don’t have to worry about it,” Linda said. “That burden isn’t there.”

‘We needed to move on’

By late afternoon, Terri Straka and a group of family members that included her two sons, her ex-husband and a nephew had unloaded the bulk of her possessions at her new house.

The two-story Cape Cod sat only several miles but a world away from her old neighborhood. It lay down a winding road, tucked amid towering pine trees. It had a big backyard, a front porch and a magnolia tree in front where she imagined her 5-year-old granddaughter playing.

Most importantly of all, there was little risk of flooding.

After vacuuming the baseboards, wiping down the windows and positioning her sofa in a spot by the brick fireplace, Straka headed outside for a break.

“You had no peace,” she said, recalling the angst in her old home each time a hurricane formed or a heavy rain would fall. “We needed to move on.”

Straka sat on the back of a half-empty U-Haul. The sun was sinking, and a breeze blew through the pines. Despite the work ahead, she already felt a weight lifting.

She nodded toward her sons, who were busy stacking boxes of clothes and Christmas ornaments in the garage. Nearby, her granddaughter was racing through the house, deciding which room would be hers when she visited.

“I loved my home. But home is where you feel safe and comfortable,” Straka said. “At least I know they are going to be safe here.”

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HEADLINE	10/26 EU falls short on promises Ukraine refugees
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/10/26/ukrainian-refugees-eu-temporary-protection/

As Ukrainians lined up outside the Prague employment office one morning, relief and frustration were only meters apart.

Zoya Valentinovna Vakulenko, 70, said she'd arrived in the Czech Republic in March and considered herself lucky to have found stable housing in a refugee center and paid work as a night receptionist there.

But waiting in a separate line designated for people with young children, Katya, 34, said her family was encountering growing hostility in a country that only months earlier welcomed Ukrainians enthusiastically. "Our children are often chased from the playground by Czech kids because they speak Ukrainian," she said.

Katya, Zoya and the [millions of Ukrainians](#) who fled to the European Union have received the same promise through the [Temporary Protection Directive](#): You can live, work, receive health care and send your children to school in whichever E.U. country you want to settle for up to three years.

Seven months on, the 27 E.U. countries have accommodated these refugees to an extent they claimed impossible during the Syrian migrant crisis of 2015 and 2016. But temporary protection has been far from a golden ticket. Many refugees have had to move from place to place and have yet to secure employment. Within a refugee population consisting primarily of women and children, mothers with young kids say it's been especially hard to find time to seek job interviews or enroll in language lessons. In some cases, success at registering their children in school and otherwise building new lives has depended on the country, city or even street they chose — or were sent to.

As many as 3 million Ukrainians have gone back — because it seemed safe enough, because they wanted to be near home and family, or, for some, because life as a refugee was frustratingly hard. But as of mid-October, [4.5 million Ukrainians](#) had registered for temporary protection — more than double the number of people who sought sanctuary in 2015 and 2016.

"Many Ukrainians are going to stay here for a long time. Maybe months, maybe years, maybe forever," said Helena Krajewska, a spokeswoman for [Polish Humanitarian Action](#), one of the country's largest aid groups. "We need to help them be able to provide for themselves."

As the war drags on and the ripple effects are felt throughout the continent, the transition from temporary relief to longer-term support is putting the bloc's commitments to the test.

Looking for work

For all the distress involved in fleeing a homeland that has become a war zone, this wave of Ukrainian refugees began arriving in the European Union at a somewhat fortuitous time: E.U. countries have been facing labor shortages and are desperate for motivated workers. Governments and business groups moved quickly to court the newcomers with [sponsorship programs](#) and job fairs.

And yet finding employment has been hard for Ukrainians who can't yet meet language requirements, or who have had to get their children settled in a new country, or who ended up in places without prior experience incorporating new arrivals.

About one-third of Ukrainian refugees 16 and older who fled to the E.U. were employed, according to recent surveys conducted by Kantar Public. That's slightly higher than in a survey by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) conducted in 43 host nations, most of which are in Europe. UNHCR found that 28 percent of refugees were employed or self-employed, compared with 63 percent before leaving Ukraine, and that 47 percent of households were relying on social benefits as their main source of income. In E.U. countries, lack of child care and language limitations were cited far more widely than the absence of employment opportunities as reasons people couldn't get jobs.

Alla Borodan, a 47-year-old educator who arrived in Germany with her teenage daughter in early March, was among those who landed work quickly. Within days, she was cleaning and babysitting for Berlin families. Then, after posting her résumé on job sites, she was offered a teaching and speech therapy

position at a local preschool that had taken in some Ukrainian children. The job did not require her to speak German. She started in early April.

“If there is a desire, then work can be found,” she said.

Tetiana Laricheva, a 32-year-old tech worker, insists it’s not about desire.

The Larichevs, originally from Donetsk, moved to Kharkiv in 2014 after Russian-backed separatists initiated an armed conflict in eastern Ukraine. Eight years later, they fled again, this time for the German capital, hoping the language classes Laricheva took in college would help.

She spent much of the initial weeks filling out paperwork and getting her two children, Dasha, 9, and Dima, 6, into school. It was tough to carve out time to rewrite her resume in German. And then, when she was able to actively look for a job, she found most employers didn’t consider her fluent enough for a position in IT. For months, she couldn’t even get an interview.

Jean-Christophe Dumont, a migration expert at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), said the employment level among Ukrainian refugees “is already not bad when you look at other refugee groups” who have taken longer to be integrated.

But employment rates for Ukrainian refugees in the E.U. vary greatly from country to country. On the high end is Poland, where more than half of working-age refugees are employed. It helped that Ukrainian expat communities in Poland mobilized to help connect newcomers with potential employers.

At the low end of the spectrum is France, where language barriers and the lack of a preexisting diaspora has hampered labor-market integration, so that only about 15 percent of working-age Ukrainian refugees may have found jobs.

Among those who are working in the E.U., government data and surveys suggest that many are either precariously employed or overqualified for what they’re doing. Ukrainian refugees in Poland, for instance, are primarily working in lower-wage sectors — logistics, manufacturing, agriculture, construction, hospitality — even though many have higher qualifications.

Tetyana Panchenko, a migration specialist at the German Ifo Institute for Economic Research, interviewed a wide range of Ukrainian refugees this summer. She said many who found work in Germany aren’t filling labor shortages in the broader economy, but are helping with Germany’s response to the refugee influx in positions that often require no or little German skills.

Searching for a home

For some Ukrainian refugees, the housing situation, too, has kept them from feeling settled.

Many people are still living in temporary accommodations — in refugee centers, in hotels, with host families. In the [recent UNHCR survey](#), only a quarter of respondents said they were renting a place of their own.

Now some of those temporary arrangements are expiring. Aid organizations say they are seeing waning interest among private citizens willing to host refugees. It was one thing for people to offer a spare room for a few months. It’s a different proposition when the war has no end in sight. Meanwhile, some countries and municipalities are pulling back support for accommodation.

In Latvia, several cities that enthusiastically welcomed Ukrainians earlier this year have [warned them to stay away](#), saying they have run out of money to help put people up.

Polish authorities have begun closing or downsizing some refugee centers, and have [tightened access](#) to a program that pays families to host refugees.

In the UNHCR survey, 27 percent of respondents said they would need to find new accommodations in the subsequent six months.

“Countries did a very good job in the first phase,” Dumont said. But “shifting from these initial reception centers to the regular housing market is a big challenge.”

The situation is especially tense in Prague, which already had one of the world’s [hottest housing markets](#) before the Czech Republic took in 450,000 refugees — more relative to its population than any other country in Europe. The arrival of refugees grew the capital, Prague, by 7 percent, overwhelming public housing and further [straining the rental market](#).

“At the beginning people were relatively open to renting to Ukrainians, but their attitude has changed,” said Petra Vybíralová, a local real estate agent. “Even though the Ukrainians are willing to pay, many landlords have developed aversion to them. A lot of people now feel that the Ukrainians are getting preferential treatment. They are also afraid that they will suddenly leave after a few months.”

Analyst Martina Kavanová, from PAQ Research, found that more than half of all Ukrainians in the country [live in cramped conditions](#). Some lack the privacy of having their own bathroom or the security of having their own key.

The housing situation for Ukrainian refugees in the E.U. is far superior to what many other asylum seekers have faced — like the notorious camp on the Greek island of Lesbos, where a garbage-strewn tent city has been replaced with a complex [fenced in with razor wire](#) and conditions are regularly declared inhumane.

At the same time, the places where Ukrainian refugees are staying often fall short of the “[suitable](#)” housing the E.U. promised as a right for anyone receiving temporary protection.

Refugees who arrived after April, and members of minorities such as Ukraine’s Roma community, have had the greatest difficulty securing housing.

Lilia Rusenko and Olha Petrenko were part of a small group of Roma refugees who were initially placed in a dormitory on the outskirts of Prague.

“We didn’t even have a key to lock our door,” said Rusenko, 43.

“It was full of bugs that were biting us during the night,” said Petrenko. “We slept with the light on because we were afraid to turn it off.”

When they complained, officials inspected the facility, acknowledged the infestation and promised help. The women were asked to hand over all of their clothing — including, humiliatingly, what they were wearing. Officials promised to wash, disinfect and return the clothes, Rusenko said, but never did. The group eventually moved to a dormitory run by a nongovernmental organization for Roma.

An hour’s drive from Prague, in Germany, spare rooms offered up for refugees sit unused.

States and cities in Germany are in some cases refusing to accept more than their official allocation of refugees, saying they have reached their capacity, said Georgia Homann of Accommodation Ukraine, which connects refugees with private hosts.

In theory, refugees are free to move anywhere in Germany. But in practice, they only receive state support if they accept being distributed to one of the country’s 16 federal states based on a quota system. If they settle in a place that has blocked new arrivals, they won’t be able to access state funds.

Seeking a school

Also among the E.U.’s promises to Ukrainian refugees: access to education.

More than 671,000 Ukrainian children [had been integrated](#) into E.U. school systems by mid-October. That's more than the entire student population in primary and secondary schools in Finland.

But the bloc hasn't said how many children are still not enrolled. Some estimates put it in the hundreds of thousands.

Lack of space in local schools is the most widely cited reason for why refugee families haven't enrolled their children, according to UNHCR.

School systems in some of the countries that have accepted the most refugees, including the Czech Republic and Poland, were under pressure even before the war in Ukraine. "There were not many teachers, not enough resources, not enough space," said Lucie Cerna, an OECD education analyst.

In Prague, some refugees report having had to go from school to school to find spots for their children.

"It's like: Are you lucky or not lucky?," said Tatiyana B., 44, who spoke to The Washington Post on the condition that only her last initial would be used, out of concern for her safety. She had searched anxiously for schools for her 10-year-old daughter who has a hearing disability. It was only with the help of aid workers that she found a school that could support her daughter's needs.

Other refugees say they were hesitant to register their children in schools knowing that their housing situation was only temporary — and not knowing where they'd be relocated next.

Requirements for enrollment can be cumbersome and difficult to navigate, too. "Schools in some countries request medical reports, proof of vaccination and authenticated translation of academic records written in Ukrainian as a precondition to enroll children, which refugees often struggle to provide," UNHCR reported.

Once students are enrolled, countries have taken different approaches to their education.

In Poland, the vast majority of Ukrainian students have been mainstreamed into regular classrooms, a form of teaching that can help integrate newcomers, but can be challenging for students who don't yet speak the language.

Germany relies on a different model of separate "welcoming classes" that provide language instruction and support (and don't slow German students down in their studies). Although the goal is to integrate students as soon as possible, many expect to remain in separate classes for months or even years.

The possibility of virtual school presents a further option. About 20 percent of parents told [UNHCR](#) that they would prefer to keep their children in remote learning, following the Ukrainian curriculum.

"Often for older kids, it's harder for them to learn new language, join a new school," said Hugh Reilly, a spokesman for UNICEF's emergency response office in Poland.

Initial reluctance, though, may be fading. Whereas many Ukrainian families initially "were expecting that they could return home," some are now prepared for a longer stay, said the OECD's Cerna.

But as Europe's welcome for Ukrainian refugees enters a new stage, some worry about what's next. From Berlin to Prague, protesters have demonstrated against E.U. sanctions on Russia, with some arguing that their government is prioritizing support for Ukraine over its own citizens.

Government aid for Ukrainian refugees has so far "been buttressed by really tremendous public solidarity," Reilly said. "But for that to continue, it's going to need sustained and significant support."

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SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2022/10/25/california-drought-forecast-record-dry/
GIST	<p>California is about to enter its wet season, when hopes are high for replenishing lowland rains and mountain snows after its three driest years on record. But, for the fourth year in a row, the state could languish in a drought that is having dire effects on its water resources.</p> <p>Last week, the National Weather Service projected another warm and dry winter for large parts of the state — with drought persisting or getting worse. Now, experts are sounding the alarm about what a fourth consecutive drought year could mean.</p> <p>“While California has seen a fourth year of drought as recently as 2012-2016 ... this will be the first drought that includes shortage issues on the Colorado River,” said Michael Anderson, California’s state climatologist with the Department of Water Resources.</p> <p>The Colorado River, once considered a guaranteed supply for Southern California, is in crisis, with states set to negotiate possible cutbacks to keep Lake Mead from plummeting to dangerously low levels. It is just 150 feet from “dead pool” level, below which water could not flow downstream.</p> <p>There is some hope that, even if significant precipitation eludes the southern and central portions of California, the northern part could fare better. Here, the Weather Service is calling for equal chances for above- and below-normal precipitation. However, there is plenty of uncertainty in long-range forecasts, and the season will largely be determined by moisture-rich atmospheric river storms: how strong they are, where they land — and where they don’t.</p> <p>“We’re playing Russian roulette with the weather, and that’s always a bad idea,” said Felicia Marcus, a fellow at Stanford’s Water in the West program and the former chair of the State Water Resources Control Board. “When the Sierras have been dry, Southern California has been bailed out by the Colorado. We have been lucky, and our system has been based on that luck.”</p> <p>Bracing for another dry year</p> <p>The past three years mark California’s third significant drought period of the 21st century — part of the larger climate change-fueled “megadrought” in the West that is now in its 23rd year, 19 of which have been dry.</p> <p>October 2019 through September 2022 — the past three water years combined — was California’s driest such period on record. In that time, much of northern California missed more than a year’s worth of precipitation.</p> <p>The long, hot summer of 2021 was marked by shrinking reservoirs and rapidly intensifying drought, as the state recorded its warmest June through September since 1895.</p> <p>“2021 was about as bad as it gets — the atmosphere was at an all-time record dryness,” said Jeffrey Mount, a senior fellow at the Public Policy Institute of California’s Water Policy Center.</p> <p>The 2022 dry season also brought below-normal precipitation in most parts of the state.</p> <p>Adding another parched year on top of the past three could put the state in uncharted territory.</p> <p>“If we get another 2021, we will be plowing new ground,” he said. “I don’t want to say we are ready, but we are certainly preparing for it.”</p> <p>No time to lose</p> <p>With each passing year, rising temperatures are playing an increasingly significant role in the water supply picture. Over the next 20 years, California could lose 10 percent of its water supply as the atmosphere, soils and plants become ever more thirsty, according to a report from the office of Gov. Gavin Newsom (D).</p>

Mount and Marcus said large metropolitan areas can probably weather another drought year, having invested billions in becoming more drought resilient in recent years.

But farmers, rural towns and ecosystems “will continue to get hammered in heartbreaking ways,” Marcus said.

Hundreds of thousands of acres of California farmland were fallowed this year. Some fish species, like delta smelt, have become functionally extinct, Mount said, meaning they are only found in hatcheries.

“Freshwater ecosystems are really in bad shape because of essentially 10 years of drought,” he said. 2017 and 2019 were the only wet years of the past decade.

Marcus said conservation efforts, like replacing lawns and fixing leaks, are the fastest, cheapest way to save water and should be expanded without delay, regardless of what the coming year brings. Longer-term solutions involve paying farmers to convert land to other uses, and recharging depleted groundwater reserves after intense storms.

“If you just hold back more in the normal times, you’ll have enough to keep fish alive during dry years and still deliver water to farms and cities,” Marcus said.

Rising flood risk, even during droughts

While scientists and planners are most worried about drought, there is also growing concern about extreme precipitation and flooding amid this dry spell. The past decade has seen wet extremes arrive both during and between drought years, and the California Department of Water Resources is also gearing up for potential flooding.

In 2017, the state swung from depleted reservoirs to what UCLA climate scientist Daniel Swain called “essentially the wettest winter in modern history in parts of northern California” at a recent symposium hosted by the Department of Water Resources. A January 2021 atmospheric river produced post-wildfire flooding and mudslides, an event that became one of the nation’s billion-dollar weather disasters. Water year 2022 — Oct. 1, 2021, through Sept. 30 — also saw wild swings between record wet and record dry conditions. And over the broader region, the West has seen recent impactful flooding in Yellowstone National Park, Las Vegas and Death Valley.

“We expect to see a significant increase in both drought and flood severity in a warming climate,” Swain said during his talk at the symposium. “This is in fact exactly what climate models suggest should be emerging right around now and continuing to amplify through the century.”

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HEADLINE	10/25 Biden gets 5 th shot: urges US to follow suit
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/25/us/politics/biden-updated-booster-covid.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — President Biden received an updated coronavirus booster shot on Tuesday, using the opportunity to plead with Americans to bolster their protection ahead of a possible surge in virus cases in the coming months.</p> <p>Flanked by top federal health officials overseeing the pandemic response, Mr. Biden warned that rising cases in Europe and new virus variants could portend another difficult winter as Americans spend more time indoors.</p> <p>“As a country, we have a choice to make,” Mr. Biden said at the White House. “Can we repeat what happened in the past winters — more infections, more hospitalizations, more loved ones getting sick, even dying from the virus? Or can we have a much better winter if we use all — all — the tools we have available to us now?”</p>

The vaccination was Mr. Biden's third booster shot and his fifth dose of a coronavirus vaccine in total. He received the new shot about three months after [contracting the virus](#) this summer — timing that lined up with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that people recently infected with the virus may wait that amount of time before receiving another vaccine dose.

White House officials have pitched the new boosters as akin to an annual flu shot, a routine inoculation timed for colder weather when more people move inside and congregate in less ventilated spaces, giving viruses an easier path to infecting people. Officials have encouraged Americans to get the vaccine in the month of October so their immunity will grow ahead of the holidays.

But only [about 20 million doses](#) of the new boosters, produced by Pfizer and Moderna, have been administered since they were introduced at the beginning of September — representing a small fraction of those eligible for the shot. About one in five seniors have received a dose, according to the White House.

“The truth is, not enough people are getting it,” Mr. Biden said. “We’ve got to change that.”

On Tuesday, the White House announced a series of steps to try to draw more attention to the shots. The Department of Health and Human Services is rolling out new advertising aimed at Black and Latino audiences, as well as radio ads with football and country music themes that will air in rural communities. The department will continue holding pop-up vaccination clinics in areas with lower vaccination rates, White House officials said, including at an upcoming NASCAR race in Arizona.

Federal regulators [authorized the new booster shots](#) at the end of August. The vaccines target the Omicron subvariants BA.4 and BA.5, the latter of which has made up a vast majority of cases in the United States in recent months. Federal scientists argued that the retooled vaccines might better protect Americans against new variants, and for longer.

Regulators are still waiting for data from human trials that the vaccine makers began recently, which could give an indication of just how protective the shots might be during the initial weeks after vaccination.

While many younger, healthier Americans already have significant protection against Covid-19 from past vaccinations and recent Omicron infections, health officials have said the new shots most likely broaden immune defenses in those who receive them. The Biden administration has been concentrating its messaging on older people, who remain more vulnerable to severe cases of the disease. On Tuesday, Mr. Biden also called for businesses and schools to help Americans get boosted.

Mr. Biden's comments on the dangers posed by the virus have zigzagged in recent weeks. He [declared in a television interview last month](#) that the pandemic was “over,” a comment that White House aides argued was meant to convey that the nation had exited the most dire phase of the fight against the virus.

Asked on Tuesday whether Covid-19 remained a national emergency, Mr. Biden said that “it’s a necessity to deal with, making sure it doesn’t become one.” But he also implored Congress to provide more funding for the federal pandemic response, suggesting that the administration would need to continue developing and buying more advanced treatments and vaccines to keep pace with the fast-changing virus.

“Some of our friends in Congress say we don’t need Covid funding, or they say there’s really no reason that the government should be paying for that,” Mr. Biden said. “I strongly disagree — strongly disagree. This is a global health emergency. If we really want to put Covid behind us, we have to keep up the fight together.”

Dr. Ashish K. Jha, the White House's Covid-19 coordinator, told reporters that the lack of additional money had forced the federal government to make trade-offs. The administration chose to fund vaccines and treatments at the expense of tests and personal protective equipment, he said at a White House briefing.

“We went into this winter without adequate stockpiles of either,” he said of tests and personal protective equipment.

About 350 people are dying from Covid-19 each day in the United States, far lower than the pandemic’s peaks, though Dr. Jha said the disease remained the third-leading cause of death in the country. Mr. Biden portrayed the virus as a more manageable threat, as deaths have become more preventable with vaccines and treatments like Paxlovid, an antiviral medication.

“We’re in the longest stretch since the virus emerged when our hospitals are not overrun with severely ill Covid patients,” the president said.

Experts have attributed that run in part to the protections that Americans have gradually acquired over the past year, as boosters were rolled out and Omicron began spreading in the United States, infecting millions of people.

“Immunity from vaccines, boosters and people being infected is actually doing something to control transmission,” said Bill Hanage, an epidemiologist at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. He said those factors helped to explain the differences between more recent case counts and the initial Omicron surge last winter.

But the prospect of another winter wave, Dr. Hanage said, means it is still too early to relax. “We’re always going to be shifting, updating, working on what’s going to happen next,” he said.

Some public health experts are concerned that as newer Omicron subvariants [pick up momentum](#) in the United States and across the world, more Americans could be at risk of severe cases. Some of those variants, which experts expect to make up a majority of cases by the winter, can dodge the protections conferred by treatments such as [Evusheld](#), an antibody drug given to people with weakened immune systems.

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HEADLINE	10/25 Russia suddenly talking about ‘dirty bombs’
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/25/us/politics/dirty-bomb-russia-ukraine.html
GIST	<p>Western officials quickly rejected Russia’s claim over the weekend that Ukraine was planning to use a so-called dirty bomb in its own territory. The United States and its allies have issued a series of statements accusing leaders in Moscow of making “transparently false allegations” to create a pretext for escalating the war.</p> <p>But the intense exchanges in recent days have renewed attention on the concept of the dirty bomb itself.</p> <p>It is a type of weapon that was thought of and tested more than three-quarters of a century ago, in the early years of the atomic age, but never fielded by a military force.</p> <p>In the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks, government officials occasionally warned that terrorists could build one with radioactive materials used in many commercial industries, and dirty bombs became a boogeyman in the public consciousness, an object of fear.</p> <p>The more formal name of the bombs — radiological dispersal devices, or R.D.D. — offers a fairly straightforward description of what these weapons are and how they work.</p> <p>Essentially, they are improvised bombs that use conventional high explosives to spread radioactive material into the surrounding area. But the fact that no military is known to have fielded one in its arsenal is a good indicator that they are not useful on the battlefield.</p> <p>What are these weapons?</p>

The most commonly imagined version is small enough to fit in a backpack and contains perhaps 20 pounds or less of explosives, with a smaller mass of radioactive material placed on top.

That's about the extent of it, though such a weapon potentially could be made much larger.

There are, however, some inherent issues with this concept that limit a bomb maker's chances of success. First, the size of the main charge: Use too much explosive material and the radioactive substance could be largely consumed by the intense heat as the bomb detonates. Use too little and the device would not spread the radioactive material very far.

Another consideration is that only a few radioisotopes, which are commonly used for medical purposes or power generation, are suitable for use in this kind of device.

A radiological dispersal device is not a "nuclear weapon" in the classical sense, as there is no fission, no fusion, no massive release of energy nor city-cratering destruction.

What happens if one explodes?

If everything works correctly — and as an improvised bomb there are many potential failure points — a dirty bomb blasts radioactive material into tiny bits and sends it into the surrounding air. It produces a localized contamination problem, not a global one.

People who inhale or ingest radioactive dust could be injured or killed, and contaminated buildings would have to be bulldozed and sent to a landfill. Excavators would likely dig up radiated soil a yard deep and tear down nearby trees — all of which would be sent to landfills as well.

But a lot of the effects would depend on atmospheric conditions.

Temperature gradients would affect how high the plume of radioactive material could rise up into the air, and the speed and direction of the wind would determine how far it could spread from the blast.

An academic paper published in a U.S. military magazine on the topic in 2004 noted that "economic and psychosocial effects are likely to be the most serious damage mechanisms from any use of an R.D.D."

"The fear of ionizing radiation is a deep-seated and frequently irrational carry-over from the Cold War," the report said. And while an attack with this kind of device "is unlikely to cause mass deaths," it has the potential to "cause great panic and enormous economic losses."

Are there other risks?

There is significant risk to the bomb maker while building this kind of weapon.

For the weapon's radiation to be lethal, the radioisotope used would have to have a strong enough intensity to harm people.

If the bomb makers acquire radiological material that is in a shielded container — meaning a vessel built in such a way to keep harmful rays from being emitted — they would have to make a critical decision: whether or not to attempt removal of the radioactive material.

The bomb makers may think removing the shielding will allow for better dispersal of the radioactive material. But doing so can expose them to harmful ionizing radiation at very close range for long enough to do real damage to their bodies — a fundamental hazard of working around radioactive materials.

Then there is the possibility of the attacker being discovered en route to place the bomb, with a strong radioactive source potentially tripping detectors along highways and bridges that alert law enforcement.

Has the U.S. military ever built a weapon like this?

	<p>According to government documents, the U.S. military experimented with radiological dispersal devices at Dugway Proving Ground in Utah from 1948 to 1952, but that work was ultimately abandoned.</p> <p>Aside from these tests, in which radiological dispersal devices of various kinds were built, there is no evidence that the U.S. military or another force ever fielded such a weapon for use in combat.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/25 Germany upsetting allies in Europe
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/25/world/europe/germany-ukraine-energy-policy.html
GIST	<p>BERLIN — At a moment when Germany’s allies seek reassurance and leadership, even its closest partners wonder aloud about its commitment to European solidarity.</p> <p>Although Germany has long been Europe’s de facto leader, it has been slow to provide serious military equipment to Ukraine. It has also subsidized its own citizens’ energy bills while working to water down a price cap on gas that could alleviate pain in poorer countries of the European Union.</p> <p>“Can we trust Germany?” Latvia’s outspoken defense minister, Artis Pabriks, asked bluntly last week at an open forum in Berlin, referring to NATO and the risks associated with the war in Ukraine. “You say ‘We are there for you.’ But do you have the political will?” He added: “We’re willing to die for freedom. Are you?”</p> <p>Those criticisms are coming not only from countries that would be expected to push for a harder line against Russia, like Poland and the Baltic States, but even from Germany’s closest partners.</p> <p>It is “not good for Europe and for Germany that it isolates itself,” France’s president, Emmanuel Macron, subtly chastised his German counterpart, Chancellor Olaf Scholz, before a European Council summit meeting last week.</p> <p>Mr. Scholz and his advisers bridle at such criticism — and disagree.</p> <p>Germany is a force for pragmatism and the third-largest contributor of military equipment to Ukraine after the United States and Britain, they argue. Wolfgang Schmidt, the chancellor’s top aide, publicly compared German security policy to a teenager in a world of adults, finding its way with good intentions.</p> <p>If late and seemingly reluctantly, Germany has recently supplied advanced weapons to Ukraine, like Gepard armored anti-aircraft guns, and at least one advanced mobile anti-aircraft missile system, the IRIS-T. Germany rushed that delivery this month, promising three more systems down the road.</p> <p>And as part of its effort to counter the criticism, Germany, which is Europe’s largest economy, hosted a multinational conference on Tuesday to focus minds on how to help Ukraine reconstruct, both during and after the war — a massive task. The German president, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, whose role is more symbolic, also visited Kyiv on Tuesday for the first time since the war began, after Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelensky, disinvited him in April, angry over Germany’s tight relations with Moscow.</p> <p>“It was important to me, especially now in this phase of air attacks with drones, cruise missiles and rockets, to send a message of solidarity,” Mr. Steinmeier said.</p> <p>But there is little doubt that the collapse of Germany’s long-held assumptions — that security in Europe must include Russia; that Russia was a reliable supplier of cheap gas and oil; that war would never again touch Europe; and that trade with autocratic regimes like Russia and China had no geopolitical implications — has been disorienting.</p> <p>Germany is undergoing an economic and psychological shock, akin to an identity crisis, said Claudia Major of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs.</p>

“The fear here is the end of the promise of prosperity — of Wohlstandsversprechen — that each generation will be better off,” she said. “And now that’s over.”

Mr. Scholz, a cautious labor lawyer from Hamburg, is carefully trying to ease the pain, especially among German voters facing a difficult winter of high inflation and soaring energy prices.

But while he acknowledges that the world has changed, “he is not saying that we must change with it,” said Ulrich Speck, a German analyst. “He is saying that the world has changed and that we will protect you,” a major risk for the future.

Mr. Scholz himself raised expectations among Germans and their allies alike just days after Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24 when, in what he called a “Zeitenwende,” or historical turning point, he announced a big hike in military spending. The extra 100 billion euros (\$99 billion) was intended to improve the sorry state of the German armed forces, but since then the government has been slow to act on its promises.

The result has been a deepening impression that Germany, with an awkward coalition government that was elected before the Russian invasion, is not able to fill Europe’s leadership vacuum, but is reluctantly joining the consensus when not going alone.

“Germany is not really a team player now — there is the sense of being dragged along,” said Jana Puglierin, director of the Berlin office of the European Council on Foreign Relations. “It’s Germany first.”

Even a major bilateral conference between France and Germany, the “couple” that has so much influence in Brussels, was just postponed from Wednesday until January because of sharp disagreements over energy, arms purchases, collective European debt and Ukraine.

Relations with Poland and the Baltics, which are pushing a harder stance on Ukraine, are rancorous. “But we’re not bonding with Italy or Spain either,” Ms. Puglierin said. “I see us alone in Europe, detached.”

Thomas Kleine-Brockhoff of the German Marshall Fund said some criticism of Germany was necessary and valid, but he feared it had gone too far.

“Criticizing Germany has become a cottage industry, but there’s no pushback from the government here,” he said. And sometimes, as in Poland and Hungary, he said, Germany is a useful whipping boy for nationalist political campaigns, especially among populists, which feeds into a larger anti-E.U. sentiment.

But on Ukraine, he said, it’s true: Germany is “just not doing enough.”

While it has supplied armored personnel carriers and advanced howitzers, Germany has drawn a line at the kind of advanced heavy weapons that might make a difference now for Ukraine in the war — in particular [the Leopard 2 tank and the Marder](#), a tank-like infantry fighting vehicle.

Those are seen by the government to be more offensive weapons that might help Ukraine push Russia back beyond the lines of Feb. 24 and prompt some unknown Russian reaction, Ms. Major said.

She and Norbert Röttgen, an opposition politician, said that the leadership holds an exaggerated fear of escalation and a desire not to panic voters, who are frightened by Russia’s nuclear threats and have delivered losses to the ruling three-party coalition in recent state elections.

So Germany has not given permission to its companies to sell Marders or Leopards to Ukraine or allowed other countries that bought the weapons to give them to Ukraine.

Instead, it has provided them to allied countries to replace Soviet-era weapons sent to Ukraine. That made sense early in the war, but [there is little Soviet-era equipment left](#).

Mr. Scholz could have created a European coalition to provide weapons “to stand up to Russia and bring Europe and the West together,” Mr. Röttgen said. “Instead, we’ve created the deepest divides and we’ve been late on delivery, so now there are questions about Germany’s reliability.”

In their defense, Mr. Scholz and his defense minister, Christine Lambrecht, a fellow Social Democrat, argue that no country has provided Ukraine with modern Western tanks, including the United States, while insisting that the tanks are so complicated they would require months of training in how to use and maintain them.

Ms. Lambrecht admitted to gaps and bottlenecks at the same Körber-Stiftung Berlin Foreign Policy Forum last week. But she repeated the mantra that “we will give Ukraine what it needs in coordination with our allies.”

In other words, Germany will not be the first to provide Western tanks. But Washington, too, has been careful to calibrate the weapons it provides Ukraine, Mr. Schmidt has pointed out.

Annalena Baerbock, the foreign minister, a Green, has always pushed for more help for Ukraine. “We will supply Ukraine with weapons as long as it takes,” she said. “Ukraine is also defending Europe’s freedom.” The war, she said, “will shape German identity and European identity for years to come.”

Asked about polls that show German reluctance to see Russia as a military adversary, she said: “I’m a politician and not a psychiatrist.” But “people are afraid of war” and of their electricity bills, she said.

On energy, Germany has been sharply criticized within Europe for its unilateral decision to cushion the blow of higher energy prices to its own citizens and companies to the tune of €200 billion, which Mr. Scholz has called “a double ka-boom,” on top of €95 billion already provided.

The amount is somewhat inflated, and other countries, like France and Spain, have also announced state aid for energy costs. But [the size of the subsidy is grating to other, poorer nations](#).

“For a country that talks of multilateralism so much, Germany has always had a unilateral energy policy,” said Daniel S. Hamilton, an American scholar of Germany, citing the sudden decision by Angela Merkel, the former chancellor, to abandon nuclear energy, and its building of the Nord Stream gas pipelines from Russia that cut out Poland and Ukraine.

“For the €200 billion, it’s not just the size but the manner of it, simply announced without European solidarity,” Mr. Hamilton said.

Mr. Speck agreed. “It was a big mistake not to see the European dimension, bringing back the image of Germany as a big egotistic power trampling on its partners,” he said.

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HEADLINE	10/25 NSA new ‘nerve center’ to scan for threats
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/oct/25/nsas-new-nerve-center-ready-scan-world-threats-ame/
GIST	<p>The National Security Agency, which is in the middle of moving into a new “nerve center” on its Fort Meade campus, says it is still ready for whatever foreign threat may emerge against the Nov. 8 midterm elections.</p> <p>“We’re ready to go,” NSA Director Gen. Paul M. Nakasone said in an interview in the “battle bridge” of the new National Security Operations Center.</p> <p>Commonly referred to as the agency’s “nerve center,” the facility provides the NSA with a real-time window into government operations across the globe and allows the agency to respond to a crisis in an instant.</p>

The NSA is America's spy agency focused on smashing codes, intercepting secret messages, and leveraging computer operations to guard the U.S. against threats coming from places such as China, Iran and Russia.

"What's NSA's competitive advantage? We make code and we break code better than anyone in the world," Gen. Nakasone said. "That's what we do."

NSA's scans the world 24 hours a day for emergencies such as a U.S. military pilot downed in unfriendly territory overseas or online chatter about a planned terror attack.

"This is the place that will wake up the director in the middle of the night," said National Security Operations Center Director Doug Nieman as he gave The Washington Times a tour of the center ahead of its formal opening this week.

Computer screens and monitors are visible in nearly every direction in the facility, with clocks keeping track of the time in foreign capitals.

Mr. Nieman's team provides a variety of services including combat support for American war fighters and sharing timely information to the president that is gathered by the government's code breakers.

The team at the nerve center includes analysts, technologists, computer scientists, and others pulled together from across NSA, ranging from top-ranking senior officials to entry-level hires. People will be moving into the center over the next six months, but the NSA did not answer how many people will work there.

"We have everything that's necessary to keep things running at the agency," Mr. Nieman said.

The sprawling center has workspace not just for agency personnel but also contractors. The embrace of civilians and contractors inside the center is indicative of a shift at NSA, which has moved from a reputation of the joking moniker "No Such Agency" to a place openly competing for talent with technology companies and cybersecurity firms.

The NSA's relationship with those outside its walls chilled when former NSA contractor Edward Snowden released a massive trove of internal documents in 2013 that revealed secret data collection involving Americans and overseas surveillance programs.

The government's iciness with the private sector has thawed in recent years amid a spate of ransomware attacks and hacks from foreign governments and their proxies that has driven businesses to seek closer relationships with the U.S. government to help fend off cyberattacks.

Gen. Nakasone said the overhaul of the NSA's East Campus including its nerve center is more than a decade in the making and intended to ensure it has state-of-the-art technology. He did not directly answer how the new tech compares to the tools at the disposal of its closest allies or its adversaries such as China, which he described as a pacing challenge.

He said the last major overhaul of NSA's East Campus occurred 25 years ago, and the changes underway now are expected to conclude in 2028. The total cost of the renovations was \$4.6 billion.

Reminders of the NSA's past and code breaking history are evident throughout the Morrison Center building that houses the nerve center. The outside of the building features five separate messages in Morse Code on a wall near the entrance.

The messages are: "defending our nation," "securing the future," "George Washington," "What hath God wrought," and "NSA."

	“What hath God wrought?” was the first telegraphic message sent by Samuel F.B. Morse, dispatched from D.C. to an assistant in Baltimore in 1844, according to the Library of Congress.
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HEADLINE	10/25 Illegal China police stations in Netherlands
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/oct/25/dutch-authorities-identify-illegal-chinese-police-/
GIST	<p>The Chinese government has set up two illegal “police stations” in the Netherlands that are used to monitor its citizens abroad, according to Dutch media.</p> <p>The offices, which the Chinese called “overseas service stations,” have been operating in Rotterdam and Amsterdam, with the latter being opened in 2018, according to a joint report by RTL Nieuws and Follow the Money.</p> <p>“These agencies are illegal,” a Dutch Foreign Affairs spokesperson said in a statement. “We will investigate exactly what they are doing here and then take appropriate action.”</p> <p>Watchdog group Safeguard Defenders reported last month that there is also a station in New York City and three in Canada.</p> <p>They are used to help the Chinese Communist Party by cracking down on criminal activities overseas involving Chinese nationals, according to reports.</p> <p>The stations are set up under the guise of helping complete administrative duties — such as renewing driver’s licenses and reporting changes in civil status — but accused dissident Wang Jingyu told RTL Nieuws that the stations have been used by Chinese authorities to stalk him internationally.</p> <p>Someone who claimed to work at the station in Rotterdam called Mr. Wang earlier this year and urged him to return to China, where there is an outstanding warrant for his arrest. He told RTL that this person told him to “think about my parents.”</p> <p>He said that someone texted him a photo of a gun with the message: “I’m going to kill you.” He received it in June after he demonstrated in front of the Chinese embassy, he said.</p> <p>Several bomb threats have also been reported in his name that prompted police to raid his home.</p> <p>The Chinese embassy told RTL that it’s not aware of the existence of the police stations. However, the outlet cites Chinese media coverage that reported on a high-level embassy official who was involved in discussions about the opening of the Amsterdam station.</p> <p>Dutch media reported that the man who runs the Amsterdam station was a former police officer in China. The man who heads up the Rotterdam station is a former soldier in the Chinese military. Other staffers at the stations are volunteers who hold the CCP’s party-line views.</p> <p>In Safeguard Defenders’ report, they said that Chinese authorities claimed that 230,000 Chinese nationals have been successfully “persuaded to return” to China to face criminal proceedings between April 2021 and July 2022.</p> <p>These “persuasions” typically involve intimidating or imprisoning family members until the accused dissident returns home.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/25 CDC: lower Covid death rates smaller cities
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/oct/25/small-cities-had-lower-covid-19-death-rates-inner-/
GIST	COVID-19 death rates in 2020 were lower in smaller metropolitan areas than in both inner cities and rural counties, according to government data released Tuesday.

In 2020, the age-adjusted death rate for COVID-19 was highest in large central metropolitan areas, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported. In those counties, where more than 1 million residents live within the same city limits, 97.7 out of every 100,000 people died from COVID.

That was 30% higher than medium-sized metropolitan counties with 250,000 to 999,000 residents, where the rate of 75 deaths was the lowest, according to a data brief from the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics.

The CDC breakdown offers "a more precise analysis" of COVID death rates than a broad comparison of rural and urban areas, according to a summary of the findings.

"For both males and females, death rates were lowest in smaller urban areas, such as the large fringe metropolitan and small or medium metropolitan areas," the data brief states.

The CDC found Americans of all ages and genders living in rural counties were more likely to die of COVID than those in most metropolitan areas.

In large fringe metro counties where more than 1 million people live in suburbs, the death rate was 79.9. It was 78.2 in smaller metro areas with populations under 250,000.

By comparison, the death rate in micropolitan rural counties with 10,000 to 50,000 residents was 86.5. And in noncore rural counties without any city, town or cluster of more than 10,000 people, the COVID death rate was 90.6.

Dr. William Schaffner, a professor of preventive medicine at Vanderbilt University Medical Center, said the report confirms several studies showing higher COVID death rates in rural areas.

"Medical care often is more distant in rural areas," Dr. Schaffner said. "In addition, the age structure often is older and certain underlying medical conditions such as diabetes along with lung and heart disease may be more common in rural areas."

COVID vaccination rates have also been "substantially lower" in rural areas than in urban areas, he added.

Dr. Amesh A. Adalja, a senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, said it's "hard to draw strong conclusions" from the CDC report since rural areas traditionally have higher death rates.

"In the early days of COVID-19, urban areas were first to be impacted, and their hospitals were inundated," said Dr. Adalja, an infectious disease specialist. "It's unclear why certain rural areas also experienced high death rates in 2020 but it may have to do with the prevalence of comorbidities, hospital density or other variables."

Dr. Panagis Galiatsatos, a physician at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, said the report shows the need for inner cities to stock up on face masks for future pandemics.

"The proper masks, when worn properly, are effective against the spread," Dr. Galiatsatos said. "In urban areas, where some homes have multiple tenants or are multi-generational, having masks allocated would help, especially since many struck with COVID could not abide by the lockdowns due to their occupation necessitating them to come into work."

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HEADLINE	10/25 New UK PM vows support Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/oct/26/biden-and-sunak-vow-to-support-ukraine-and-counter-china-in-first-call

The US president, Joe Biden, and Britain's new prime minister, [Rishi Sunak](#), agreed during talks on Tuesday to work together to support Ukraine and stand up to China, the White House said.

They spoke for the first time a few hours after Sunak became Britain's third prime minister this year, inheriting an economic crisis after the resignation of Liz Truss whose tenure lasted 49 days.

Only in recent days has Biden appeared to publicly criticise Truss's doomed economic strategy, in a rare intervention by the US president. Relations between the two countries have also been somewhat strained in recent years amid ongoing tensions over post-Brexit arrangements in Northern Ireland. The White House holds concerns over the impact on peace in the region.

Biden and Sunak reaffirmed the "special relationship" between the US and Britain, and said they would work together to advance global security and prosperity, the White House said in a summary of the conversation.

"The leaders agreed on the importance of working together to support Ukraine and hold Russia accountable for its aggression," the statement said of the war triggered by the Russian invasion.

Sunak has promised the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, that Britain's support for Ukraine will be steadfast and "as strong as ever under his premiership", a Downing Street spokesperson has said. "The prime minister said ... President Zelenskyy could count on his government to stand in continued solidarity. Both leaders agreed on the need to continue to place pressure on Putin's barbaric regime through continued economic sanctions."

For his part, Zelenskyy said he believed "British leadership in defending democracy and freedom" would only get stronger. "Ukraine and Britain have reached new heights in relations lately but nevertheless we still have potential to strengthen our cooperation," he said in an evening video address, adding that he had invited Sunak to visit Ukraine.

The White House said Biden and Sunak also agreed to "address the challenges posed by China", which Washington has identified as its top geopolitical and economic rival on the world stage.

Downing Street had earlier released its own summary of the call, in which it referred to efforts to "counter China's malign influence".

The statement read: "President Biden congratulated the prime minister on his appointment and the leaders looked forward to working closely together. President Biden said that the UK remains America's closest ally, and the prime minister agreed on the huge strength of the relationship.

"The leaders discussed the extent of UK-US cooperation, both bilaterally and in regions such as the Indo-Pacific where the Aukus pact forms part of our efforts to enhance stability and counter China's malign influence.

"They reflected on the leading role our countries are playing in supporting the people of Ukraine and ensuring Putin fails in this war.

"The prime minister and President Biden also agreed on the need to ensure the people of Northern Ireland have security and prosperity through preserving the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement."

The two leaders are expected to meet in person at the G20 Summit in Indonesia next month.

Britain has been a key European ally of the US in arming and supporting the Ukrainian military as it tries to repel the Russian invasion, which began in February.

Earlier on Tuesday, Biden had congratulated Sunak in a tweet.

	On Monday, Biden described the naming of Britain's first non-white prime minister as "pretty astounding, a groundbreaking milestone".
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HEADLINE	10/26 Day 245 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/26/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-245-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donetsk oblast was hit hard in the past day, with at least 15 Russian strikes killing seven civilians and injuring three more. The Ukrainian national police said the strikes also destroyed 19 residential buildings and one power line. • Farther south, a car explosion near the office of Russian propaganda channel ZaTV in Russia-occupied Melitopol injured at least five people, including company employees, authorities said. While investigators were still looking into the blast, Vladimir Rogov, a Russian-appointed occupied Zaporizhia oblast official, reportedly told Russian state media the explosion came from an "improvised explosive device". • Russia took its case to the UN security council that Ukraine is preparing to use a "dirty bomb" on its own territory, an assertion dismissed by western and Ukrainian officials as misinformation and a pretext for intensifying the war. • Ukraine's foreign minister said inspectors from the UN nuclear watchdog would soon inspect two Ukrainian sites at Kyiv's request, adding that it feared Moscow's "dirty bomb" allegations were preparation for a "false-flag" operation. • The US congressional Progressive Caucus withdrew a letter to the White House urging a negotiated settlement, its chair, Pramila Jayapal, confirmed. • Vladimir Putin said Russia needed to speed up decision-making in the military campaign in Ukraine. • Moscow was generally supportive of the idea of creating a secure zone around the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia's ambassador to international institutions in Vienna, told the Tass news agency. • Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, reiterated a pledge to retake the city of Kherson, which would be a big setback for Putin. • Russia has notified the US of plans to carry out annual exercises of its nuclear forces, the US government said, adding that it lowered the risk of miscalculation at a time of "reckless" Russian nuclear rhetoric. • Britain's incoming prime minister, Rishi Sunak, promised Zelenskyy that the UK's support for Ukraine would be steadfast and "as strong as ever" under his premiership". • A Russian court dismissed WNBA basketball star Brittney Griner's appeal against a nine-year sentence for possessing and smuggling vape cartridges containing cannabis oil. Griner's lawyer said she hoped she could be released in a prisoner exchange with the US. • The US is considering sending older Hawk air defence equipment from storage to Ukraine, two US officials told Reuters. • Zelenskyy and the European hosts of a donor conference laid out a vision of a future Ukraine as a European Union member and major exporter of green energy to the continent. • The European Commission urged EU countries and companies to donate more money and equipment to support the energy sector in Ukraine, over a third of which has been destroyed by Russian missile and drone strikes. • Ukraine's external financing needs will be around \$3bn a month through 2023 in a best case scenario, but could rise as high as \$5bn, said the IMF managing director, Kristalina Georgieva. • Poland's prime minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, has said Russian assets and those of Russian oligarchs amount to "huge pot of gold" that should be used for Ukraine's reconstruction. "We must make sure that the offender pays for reconstruction. Russia should pay Ukraine war damages, war reparations." • Police rescued an eight-year-old boy whose parents were killed in Russian shell strikes in Bakhmut, it was reported. Iuliia Mendel, a former spokesperson for Volodymyr Zelenskyy, said

	<p>the boy's mother was seven months pregnant when she died "in the street" along with his father.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukrainian authorities are estimating that Russian forces have lost nearly 68,420 personnel since the start of the invasion. • Refugees who fled in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine should stay abroad this winter due to blackouts created by Moscow's bombardment of energy infrastructure, a Ukrainian minister has said.
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HEADLINE	10/26 Russia war crimes going unpunished?
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/26/nobel-peace-prize-winner-russian-war-crimes-oleksandra-matviichuk
GIST	<p>Oleksandra Matviichuk has a point she wants to make. The Ukrainian lawyer heads the Centre for Civil Liberties, a human rights organisation that this month jointly won the Nobel peace prize. And she wants to use her platform to call for international action against Russian human rights violations now.</p> <p>The body she heads has patiently documented more than 21,000 examples of war crimes committed by occupying Russian forces since 2014, including many from after the invasion in February. But, speaking quietly and with controlled emotion, she complains: "I haven't any legal instrument to stop the Russian atrocities" – no immediate way of bringing perpetrators to court.</p> <p>The criminality appears vast when listed. "After the large-scale invasion, we every day documented different kinds of war crimes, like intentional shelling of residential buildings, churches, hospitals, schools, the shelling of evacuation corridors," Matviichuk says. "We received requests for help from people in the occupied territories because they were abducted, tortured; we recorded sexual violence, extrajudicial killings."</p> <p>Staff from the Centre for Civil Liberties were among those who travelled through Irpin, Bucha and towns and villages north-west of Kyiv after Russia abandoned its attempt to seize the city in March. "I will remind you," she says, that bodies were found lying uncollected in the streets, or dumped in mass graves. "And what was Putin's response? He provided medals to the army unit that was staying in Bucha."</p> <p>Russia, as governed now, shows a "genocidal character," she argues. At first she admits the sheer emotional difficulty of taking in the trauma of individual cases, particularly understandable when her organisation deals with so many.</p> <p>Gradually, Matviichuk tells a story of a pregnant young woman severely beaten in Russian captivity after the war of 2014. "She begged for them to stop beating her because she's expecting a baby. But she was told 'you have pro-Ukrainian sympathies, and therefore your child has no right to be born'."</p> <p>Later, in a further insult, Matviichuk says, the woman's captors agreed to free her if she told a Russian journalist that she was a sniper – a false story – but then "asked her to sit in a pose that her pregnancy was hidden" when being interviewed.</p> <p>These are stories that one might not want to dwell on but that cannot be swept aside. "Because we have a huge material collected – 21,000 episodes of war crimes – we can be very clear that Russia used war crimes as a method of warfare," she says – and that Russia has sought to subject Ukraine to a "psychological experiment" through "the immense pain of the civilian population".</p> <p>Matviichuk then refers, loosely, to controversial experiments from the 1960s in which dogs were subjected to electric shocks. "A dog was beaten with electricity every time it tried to eat, and resulted in the situation when this poor dog decided to die with a hunger but not try to survive," she says. The phenomenon in which an animal or person gives up avoiding pain because it has been subjected to so much already is called, she says, "learned helplessness".</p>

It is an aim Russia has been allowed to pursue for 20 years to the point, Matviichuk argues, where it has become a pattern of behaviour. “This hell which we’re going through now is a result of total impunity of Russia, which they enjoyed for decades, because they committed horrible crimes in Chechnya, in Moldova, in Georgia, in Mali, in Libya and Syria they have never been punished for,” she says. “They believed they could do what they wanted because they are a member of the UN security council”.

The concept of fundamental human rights has been eroded so liberties now depend on where a person lives as a result of the failure to respond, she says. “It’s very dangerous to live in the world where your security depends not on the rule of law but on whether your country is a part of a military bloc. That’s a dangerous line of development for humankind.”

Matviichuk’s organisation won the 2022 Nobel peace prize in conjunction with Memorial, a Russian human rights group outlawed by the Kremlin, and the veteran Belarussian activist Ales Bialiatski, who is being held in prison without trial in his native country. At the time of the announcement this month, some Ukrainian politicians wondered aloud whether a joint Ukraine-Russia award was appropriate. “Interesting understand of the word ‘peace’,” tweeted the presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak.

But the chair of the Kyiv-based Centre for Civil Liberties brushes this off with a familiar universalism. “Freedom and human rights has no limitation,” Matviichuk says. She says her group was congratulated by Andriy Yermak, the president’s chief of staff, in a meeting shortly after the award was announced, although she says her organisation has had some disagreements with the Ukrainian government, including over security service reform.

Her key argument is that in the current conflict, war crimes risk going unexamined and unpunished, even allowing for all the international attention. “We are in a situation when national system is overloaded with an extreme amount of crimes and the international criminal court will limit its investigation only to several select cases. So we have an accountability gap.”

Providing more resources to local judiciary and to the international court in The Hague is only part of the answer, she says. That prompts the question of whether Matviichuk believes there could be a role for a special Ukraine war crimes court, similar to the Nuremberg trials of surviving Nazi leaders at the end of the second world war.

“We have to find the courage and to establish an international tribunal to hold Putin, [Alexander] Lukashenko [the Belarus president] and other war criminals accountable,” Matviichuk says. But her suggestion would be for it to start work now, not as Nuremberg did “only after [the] Nazi regime had collapsed”. Justice “must be independent of Putin’s power. We can’t wait,” she says.

Does the international community have the will to try to take on Russia over this issue? Matviichuk argues that the peace prize may help advance the case. “We will use this platform in order to promote justice and accountability in order to achieve sustainable peace,” she says, before resorting to an essential moral argument. “We have to provide justice for people who suffered from horrible atrocities.”

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HEADLINE	10/25 Ukraine manufacturer charged w/treason
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/25/ukraine-arms-manufacturer-charged-with-treason-over-bugged-phone-calls
GIST	<p>Alleged recordings of the head of a major Ukrainian aircraft manufacturer accused of aiding the Russian military – saying he “completely understands” why a Russian missile was fired at his factory – have been released by Kyiv’s security services after his arrest at the weekend.</p> <p>Vyacheslav Boguslaev, the president of Motor Sich, has been charged with treason after a raid at the weekend on his home in the southern Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia. The manufacturing heavyweight is suspected of selling engines – before and after the invasion – for Russian attack helicopters that have been used extensively against Ukrainian troops.</p>

The release of the alleged recordings have served as a reminder of the historic ties between veteran figures in the two countries' arms industries and Ukraine's internal battle to root out collaborators.

Answering questions from journalists at a Kyiv courthouse about whether or not he had contracts with companies that work with the Russia military, Boguslaev said he was not "in the loop" and that Motor Sich produced some of the "best helicopters".

A lawyer for Boguslaev said his client had poor hearing and had not yet listened to the recordings released by Ukraine's security services. The lawyer added that Boguslaev would explain his position during the trial. A judge ordered for Boguslaev to be held for two months without the possibility of bail.

In one of the alleged recordings, Boguslaev is heard telling an unnamed interlocutor after a Russian missile strike on Motor Sich's factory in the Zaporizhzhia region in March that he sees the attack as necessary collateral damage for Russia's victory.

"If Putin is finished off, then the nationalists will finish us off ... an Iskander-M fell on the territory of the factory. We have absolutely no negative feelings about it. We completely understand," Boguslaev was recorded saying about the Russian attack.

Motor Sich inherited the capabilities after the fall of the Soviet Union to manufacture engines and other parts for aircraft still used by the Russian military. Ukraine's security services allege the series of tapped phone calls took place between Boguslaev and Russian state arms manufacturers.

On one call from just before the 24 February invasion of Ukraine, Boguslaev allegedly relayed that Russian defence officials were replacing helicopter engines "everywhere" as they had "grand plans".

In a later recording from March, Boguslaev allegedly discussed how to send parts via third-party countries to evade sanctions. Croatia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were among the routes suggested. The US has previously warned that Russia was using third-party destinations to evade western sanctions on its defence sector.

Most of the tapped calls were said by the Ukrainian security services to be between Boguslaev and Pyotr Motrenko, the former head of Rostvertol, Russia's state helicopter company, which is owned by Russia's state arms manufacturer. The two men are veterans in their respective defence industries.

Boguslaev tells Motrenko several times that he's calling from a "different phone" and refers several times to Motrenko as "my dear", a form of address reserved for very close friends. Motrenko emphasises that the contract with Boguslaev has been agreed at the "highest levels" in Russia.

The incident is a reminder of the deep-running connections between the older echelons of the two militaries that formerly served one state – the Soviet Union.

Since Boguslaev's arrest, Ukraine's security service agents have posted pictures of a Russian coat of arms and awards for his cooperation with the Russian defence sector, which they say were found in his home. Ukrainian journalists from Radio Liberty later published a photograph of Boguslaev's Russian passport.

Boguslaev is one of dozens of Ukrainians in powerful positions that have been charged with treason since 2014. A translator for the former Ukrainian prime minister, Volodymyr Groysman, was arrested for being a Russian spy in 2017 and handed to Russia as part of a prisoner swap in two years later. In July, Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, sacked his intelligence chief and childhood friend, Ihor Bakanov, for failing to rid the country's security services of Russian collaborators.

Boguslaev has not commented on the allegations. Motor Sich [has published](#) a statement on its website calling the allegations against him "outrageous" and stating that the company had been working to strengthen Ukraine's defence capabilities.

	<p>Ukrainian firms were banned from dealing with the Russian military after 2014.</p> <p>Ukrainian investigative journalists published contracts between Motor Sich and Russian state defence firms in 2016 – unearthed in Russian court files – and 2019, but Ukraine’s authorities and Motor Sich did not publicly react to their findings.</p> <p>After the night-time raid in Zaporizhzhia, Boguslaev was taken by convoy to Kyiv, according to a statement issued by the Ukrainian security agency. The head of foreign trade for Motor Sich is also being tried to collusion with Russia alongside Boguslaev. He declined to comment on the allegations when asked by journalists.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/25 Seattle crews prepare for urban flooding
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/weather/seattle-urban-flooding-increased-rain/281-51d80d92-2e07-4302-acb7-9678616a7ce9
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — With an increase of wet weather expected to stick around in Seattle, Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) workers are gearing up to respond to heavy rain in the coming months.</p> <p>Storm season is coming, and preparations are key to keeping people and property safe. SPU has a handful of employees closely monitoring the weather forecast, so they can properly utilize the 150-field staff they have to respond to emergencies. They also have 15 vactor trucks ready to roll at a moment’s notice to remove debris and leaves from storm drains, which could cause flash flooding.</p> <p>“Overflow into our roads, making them unpassable and into our parks and other areas where we like to recreate so we like to get those leaves taken care of out of the storm drain,” said Ellen Stewart, the SPU Interim Deputy Director for Drainage & Wastewater.</p> <p>Despite the resources, it's a big task, Seattle has more than 33,000 storm drains throughout the city. So, officials said it's crucial community members do their part, by clearing storm drains near their homes, with rakes, gloves and other tools.</p> <p>"Our crews can't be everywhere, we like to concentrate them on keeping our critical routes open and our arterials and areas where we've seen flooding before," said Stewart. "So, it's really great when we can have neighbors take care of the drains in front of their own homes."</p> <p>During the month of November, SPU is allowing customers to leave out 10 additional bags of leaves and debris during their weekly pickups.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/25 Despite rain, snow Bolt Creek fire still burns
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/despite-rain-snow-along-highway-2-bolt-creek-fire-still-burning/5OSH6LL7ZJEMRC54X4LNO4VYF4/
GIST	<p>SKYKOMISH, Wash. — After an unseasonably warm October, the Cascades are finally getting their first taste of precipitation.</p> <p>Along the Skykomish River on Highway 2, there is now an increased risk of debris flow and landslides.</p> <p>Further up the road, the Stevens Pass Ski Area received a dusting of snow. Even with all this wet weather, the Bolt Creek Fire continues to burn.</p> <p>Stevens Pass General Manager Ellen Galbrait isn’t sure the snow on the ground will stick around, but she’s celebrating the soggy forecast.</p>

	<p>“When I drove in this morning, it was awesome to see the snowline,” said Galbraith. “To have the precipitation, not just rain but also snow to help put those fires out, is a big relief to not only us, but the community.”</p> <p>In years past, emergency crews have battled fires on the east side of the ski area toward Leavenworth, but never on the west side.</p> <p>RB McKeon, with the Washington State Department of Transportation, says this is uncharted territory.</p> <p>“Its sort of an ever-evolving situation,” said McKeon. “We’ve gone from wildfire response to winter weather response.”</p> <p>WSDOT officials are busy knocking down hazardous trees, a process that could take weeks, perhaps even months.</p> <p>On top of that, they’ve now got to keep their eyes on the winter weather warning issued for the Cascades.</p> <p>As for the risk of avalanche this upcoming winter, WSDOT says its too soon to tell.</p> <p>The Northwest Avalanche Center agrees. Officials there acknowledge changes in terrain could contribute to a collapse, but the main factor they monitor is snowpack.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/25 WSU lifting Covid-19 vaccine mandate
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/ws-u-lifting-covid-19-vaccine-mandate-legal-experts-weigh-move/QQFN6LNK2RD77FS3CKK4TJOKDI/
GIST	<p>PULLMAN, Wash. — The Washington State University is lifting its COVID-19 vaccine requirements for most employees, contractors, and volunteers in most cases at the end of October.</p> <p>The university released a statement, citing that the decision was made in compliance with Governor Jay Inslee’s State of Emergency ending with the week. While they are lifting the requirement, they still encourage employees to get their shots in order to protect themselves and others.</p> <p>WSU’s vaccine mandate was one of the reasons former head football coach Nick Rolovich was fired last season.</p> <p>Rolovich, as well as several assistant coaches, did not want to get the shot. Rolovich says he didn’t want it for religious reasons, which has led him to file a wrongful termination claim for \$25 million against the state.</p> <p>KIRO 7 asked several Seattle-based attorneys on how the lifting of this requirement will impact Rolovich’s case, as well as others who were terminated by the requirement.</p> <p>Mike Subit with Frank Freed Subit & Thomas LLP says he doesn’t think it will necessarily have a major impact in decisions, but how the negotiations between Rolovich and the school will go.</p> <p>“I think on negotiations it probably does,” Subit said. “For example, it may not be true for the head coach of WSU, but some people who were fired then could be brought back now. And for certain jobs, that’s a possibility and may be a way for avoiding a lawsuit to go into court.”</p> <p>He says, however, the state and university will defend their decision based on the facts about the pandemic when Rolovich was let go.</p>

“As a strictly legal matter, whether they have a claim or not, it’s going to be judged by when they were fired. Whether they had a sincere religious objection, whether they had a disability, whether the state could have accommodated the accommodation then,” Subit said.

Attorney Scott Blankenship agrees with Subit and believes if there was proof that COVID vaccines weren’t as effective in preventing spread, then Rolovich and others might potentially have a case.

“But at the time, we were in a much greater crisis and all state employees were mandated to get vaccinated,” Blankenship said.

Medical experts are also concerned with the school’s decision.

Ali Mokdad with UW’s Institute for Health, Metrics and Evaluation said that based on what’s happening in parts of Europe and around the world, another surge for Western Washington is probable.

“So, depending on the scenario we will see more cases, but not as many hospitalizations in Singapore, or in what we see in terms of Germany with an increase in cases and rapid increase in hospitalizations. That’s the worst-case scenario,” Mokdad said.

He says while the school may have lifted the mandate, he encourages everyone to be up to date on their vaccines.

“The only protection we have in order to keep people away from hospitals and mortality is the vaccine,” Mokdad said.

Now, when it comes to the University of Washington, a spokesperson with the school says they are maintaining their requirements for the time being.

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HEADLINE	10/25 Seattle free Narcan, fentanyl test strips
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/giving-people-tools-save-their-life-vending-machine-provides-free-narcan-fentanyl-test-strips/KB6KHXD7Z5DPBLI6AAND4R46GI/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — In an ongoing effort to combat drug overdoses across the county, King County Public Health and Peer Seattle have teamed up and are providing people in Capitol Hill with access to a vending machine that provides Fentanyl testing strips and Narcan.</p> <p>The vending machine also supplies safe sex kits.</p> <p>The vending machine has been at Peer Seattle for a few months, and director Christopher Archiopoli said people have been using it daily.</p> <p>“The fentanyl testing strips allow people to understand what it is that they’re using, the drugs they’re ingesting, and Narcan can save people’s lives if they’ve already ingested fentanyl,” he said. “What we’ve seen is that people are more than willing to accept the help we have to offer.”</p> <p>The vending machine is free to everyone, and people can access it from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. every day. All you need is a cellphone and to answer a couple of questions.</p> <p>However, if you don’t have a phone, Peer Seattle will still help get you access.</p> <p>“Giving people tools to save their life until they’re ready to make that change I think is really important,” Archiopoli said.</p> <p>KIRO 7 was at Peer Seattle when Anthony Wiencko walked in to use the vending machine. He said he wants to have these tools just in case.</p>

	<p>“I’m pretty sure everything is laced with something, so people could be doing something that has nothing to do with opioids and this could save their life,” Wiencko said.</p> <p>There is one other vending machine like this one in King County, and that one is located at Peer Kent.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/25 Report: meth use in Seattle skyrockets
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/audit-shows-alarming-increase-meth-use-seattle-reward-system-proposed-keep-users-clean/JYAGCCVCTFB5DOMS4LNXQZATRQ/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Methamphetamine use is skyrocketing in Seattle, according to a new report, and an increase in fatal overdoses has led to a new proposal by city officials.</p> <p>An audit showed the drug is involved in 74% of overdose deaths for people experiencing homelessness.</p> <p>Meth overdose deaths are increasing year after year.</p> <p>King County reported 98 meth-involved deaths in 2016. That increased to 365 deaths in 2021.</p> <p>As of Oct. 6, there has already been 318 meth-involved deaths this year.</p> <p>The audit was requested by Seattle City Council members Andrew Lewis and Lisa Herbold, who are proposing what they call “contingency management,” a reward system for people to stay clean.</p> <p>For example, someone using meth would submit urine tests to track their recovery progress.</p> <p>If the results are negative, the person would receive something like a gift card or voucher.</p> <p>The value of the reward would increase every time a negative test is submitted.</p> <p>If the test results are positive for drugs or the person misses an appointment, the next reward reverts to the original amount.</p> <p>The average total reward someone would be able to receive through a 12-week intervention would be about \$300.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/25 Covid-19 state emergency ends next week
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/washington-state-covid-19-coronavirus-pandemic-governer-jay-inslee-emergency-orders-ending-october-31-masks-vaccines-whats-next#
GIST	<p>SEATTLE, Wash. — The COVID-19 state of emergency is about to end in the state of Washington.</p> <p>Next Tuesday will mark the official end of the COVID-19 emergency declaration from February 2020. Gov. Jay Inslee announced in September that the state of emergency would end on Oct. 31.</p> <p>Most of the state's COVID-19 emergency orders have already ended, so what will change over the next week?</p> <p>VACCINES & MASKS</p> <p>Inslee's controversial emergency order requiring state, health, and education employees to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 will expire next Tuesday. However, Inslee ordered a permanent COVID-19 vaccination requirement for 56 state agencies in the 'executive cabinet' and 'small cabinet' earlier this year - that requirement will not expire on Oct. 31.</p>

[Washington State University announced earlier this month](#) that new students after the 2022-2023 school year will not be required to be vaccinated, in accordance with the emergency order expiring.

The only remaining mask requirements will be for healthcare and long-term care facilities, as well as some correctional facilities, according to Inslee's office. Many indoor mask requirements [were already lifted earlier this year](#).

HEALTHCARE AND LONG-TERM CARE FACILITIES

On Thursday, [13 health orders](#) related to health care and long-term care facilities will expire.

"These emergency orders waived and suspended various statutes and rules, and prohibited certain activities, in order to provide the flexibility needed to respond to the pandemic and protect those receiving care. Examples of suspended statutory requirements include those related to training, testing and certification of various health care professionals and the certificate of need process for health care facilities," the governor's office [said in a post on its website](#).

Facilities have had since July to prepare for the transition to pre-COVID requirements and the Department of Health has been providing technical assistance support for facilities.

NON-URGENT MEDICAL PROCEDURES

In March 2020, [Inslee issued an emergency proclamation](#) which restricted many non-urgent medical and dental procedures. That order has since been amended several times and it will expire completely on Thursday.

TRACKING COVID-19

The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) told KOMO News that it is in the process of updating all guidance and processes related to COVID-19 and they expect to have a briefing before the order expires next week.

DOH also plans to continue [monitoring and reporting of COVID-19 cases](#), though data updates will be reduced to once a week.

KING COUNTY

[Seattle leaders announced earlier this month](#) that the city's state of emergency will end along with the state's on Oct. 31. Seattle will still require city employees to be vaccinated against COVID-19. The King County Health Department sent the following statement to KOMO News:

The county's vaccine mandate still applies under Executive Order ACO-8-27-EO (for county employees) and ACO-8-28-EO (for contractors and volunteers) even though the state will be lifting its emergency declarations. Therefore, consistent with current policy and practice, all executive branch employees, county contractors, and volunteers are required to be fully vaccinated unless they are otherwise accommodated. New hires will continue to need to provide proof of full vaccination before their start date.

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You can see all active proclamations on the [governor's office website](#).

HEADLINE	10/25 Vice president arrives in Seattle
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/vice-president-kamala-harris-visits-seattle-washington-environmental-protection-agency-administrator-michael-regan-white-house-clean-schools#
GIST	<p>SEATTLE (KOMO) — Vice President Kamala Harris arrived in Seattle Tuesday night ahead of two scheduled events Wednesday in the Puget Sound region.</p> <p>Harris is set "to deliver remarks at an event highlighting the Biden-Harris Administration's investments in clean school buses" in Seattle on Wednesday, according to the White House. She will be joined by Environmental Protection Agency administrator Michael Regan. The event is being held at Lumen Field at 10:20 a.m.</p>

	<p>The vice president will then speak at a finance event with Senator Patty Murray at 1 p.m. at the Showbox Market, the White House said.</p> <p>Harris departed Albuquerque, New Mexico, en route to Seattle at 2:50 p.m. Pacific Standard Time on Tuesday. She will touch down at King County International Airport and spend the night in Seattle.</p> <p>The Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) said Harris' visit will affect traffic throughout western Washington.</p> <p>"During vice presidential visits, the U.S. Secret Service has the authority to provide security, including requiring intermittent closures of freeways and streets," SDOT said. "The flow of buses and cars in downtown Seattle and around the region will be affected.</p> <p>"While Vice President Harris' exact travel routes and timing are not published in advance, travelers can still plan ahead by anticipating delays and temporary road closures."</p> <p>A group gathered outside of the vice president's hotel Tuesday evening holding signs that appeared to be in support of women in Iran.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/25 Seattle frustration: pedestrian deaths
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/seattles-vision-zero-progress-stalling
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - Emotions are boiling over from city hall to street corners after yet another pedestrian was killed in Seattle on Friday.</p> <p>Leaders set a goal to end traffic-caused walking and biking deaths by 2030, part of a program called Vision Zero. But, some say the program is stalling, as Seattle's streets remain dangerous for those who do not travel by vehicle.</p> <p>"The cars are really fast and construction makes it hard," said Declan Hoban. "It is a lot of navigating."</p> <p>Hoban walks the sidewalks in the Rainier Valley to and from work and she worries drivers are not keeping watch for people on their feet.</p> <p>The intersection of Rainier Avenue South and South Walden Street is where Seattle Police say a 66-year-old woman was killed Friday night. The driver took off, leaving the woman dead in the road.</p> <p>Since Seattle launched the Vision Zero campaign in 2015, 1,200 people have been injured and 175 have died navigating the city without a car. Data reveals the city's south end bears the brunt of casualties.</p> <p>"It is unacceptable because it is all preventable," said Seattle Councilmember Tammy Morales during a meeting this summer.</p> <p>In a statement to FOX 13 News, Morales complains that 50% of road fatalities happen in the south end, even as plans for protected bicycle lanes are delayed until 2024.</p> <p>Morales' complaints today are just as vigorous as when the Seattle Department of Transportation presented findings to the council this summer.</p> <p>Seattle Police are looking for the driver of a dark-colored sedan last seen leaving the area of Friday's crash.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/25 Natural gas prices in Europe plunging
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SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/25/business/europe-gas-prices-winter.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=Business
GIST	<p>The war in Ukraine is raging, Russian natural gas exports to Europe are dwindling and the winter heating season is approaching. That would seem like a recipe for higher prices, yet the cost of the fuel, which is vital for heating homes and for powering electricity plants and industry, has been plummeting.</p> <p>The benchmark European price of natural gas this week fell to a level that is more than 70 percent below its record high in August. One of the main reasons for the plunge in prices is that Europe, at least for now, has all the natural gas it needs.</p> <p>That is because over the summer, Europe went on a global buying spree as Russia, its longtime main supplier, reduced its flow of natural gas.</p> <p>Across the continent, governments and businesses have aggressively replenished how much gas they are holding in storage. At the urging of European Union officials and at a high cost, energy companies and governments have filled underground caverns and other facilities to more than 90 percent of capacity, compared with less than 80 percent year ago.</p> <p>Companies that sell natural gas, driven by the high prices, flooded the European market. Special ships with huge amounts of liquefied natural gas, or L.N.G., raced to Europe from the United States, Qatar and other countries (including Russia) that produce large amounts of gas.</p> <p>The rush to sell to Europe was so great that vessels are now loitering off the coast waiting for slots at crowded terminals to unload their cargoes. One illustration of the glut: In recent days, at least one L.N.G. carrier heading from Algeria to Europe appears to have diverted to Asia in search of a better price, according to Laura Page, an analyst at Kpler, a research firm.</p> <p>Europe's healthy stocks of gas represent a substantial buffer against further cutoffs of Russian supplies or other shocks.</p> <p>"You've got storage levels that people could only dream of a few months ago," said Massimo Di Odoardo, vice president for gas research at Wood Mackenzie, a consulting firm.</p> <p>At the same time, the demand for natural gas, which serves as a major source of power to generate the electricity that Europe consumes, has fallen sharply, another factor pulling prices down. A warmer-than-usual start to autumn in many parts of Europe has meant that residents have not needed to use much, if any, heat.</p> <p>But analysts warn that the recent drop in gas prices could be fleeting — natural gas that is set to be delivered to Europe this winter is already being sold in futures markets at a considerable markup to the current price. The unusually large swings in prices that have come as Russia constricted gas supplies in recent months are likely to continue.</p> <p>Gas prices in Europe remain historically elevated, even after the recent decline, trading at twice the level set at this time a year ago and even higher versus long-term averages.</p> <p>As a result, many energy-hungry businesses like aluminum smelters, steel mills and fertilizer plants have at least temporarily shut down. In Italy, a large gas consumer, demand for the fuel in August and September was down about 10 percent compared with the same months a year ago.</p> <p>The threat of regulation has also weighed on markets, analysts say. The European Union's recent agreement to impose a ceiling on gas prices, while still lacking in detail, is probably lowering prices, analysts say.</p> <p>But in the short run, lower prices may cause their own sort of pain, according to Henning Gloystein, a director at Eurasia Group, a political risk firm.</p>

European utilities, which are in the business of buying gas to generate electricity and sell to customers, have [already taken losses](#) because of the cutoff of Russian gas and may have ordered expensive L.N.G. to compensate for the lost supplies. Now, because of lower-than-expected demand, they could be stuck with the fuel. “That may force some utilities to sell their expensive cargoes much more cheaply elsewhere, perhaps causing big fiscal damage,” Mr. Gloystein said.

Lower gas prices could also weaken the incentive for developing more expensive clean fuels like hydrogen. What’s more, it could act as a brake on re-engineering commodities markets to break the link between electric power and natural gas, although some analysts say that is inevitable.

“The ball is rolling and I believe that there is widespread acceptance of the need for change,” said Martin Young, a London-based analyst at Investec, an investment bank.

And experts say it is too soon to get comfortable about the prospects for cheaper gas, since markets are reacting to circumstances that may not last. Futures prices for natural gas for delivery in January and February of 2023 are trading more than 40 percent higher than for November.

Prices might be tested if Russia cut off the remaining flows of gas to Europe through Ukraine or if there was sabotage of energy infrastructure, like the [unexplained ruptures in the Nord Stream pipelines](#) that run from Russia to Germany.

Then there is the weather. “The test will come when we have the first cold snap and storage starts to empty,” said Jonathan Stern, the founder of the gas program at the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies. “We will see how the market reacts to that.”

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HEADLINE	10/25 Russia court upholds Griner’s 9yr sentence
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/10/25/world/russia-ukraine-war-news#an-appeals-court-upholds-griners-nine-year-sentence
GIST	<p>A Russian court on Tuesday upheld the American basketball star Brittney Griner’s sentence on drug smuggling charges, clearing the way for her to serve nine years in a penal colony and adding to pressure on the United States government to negotiate a deal for her release.</p> <p>“We are very disappointed,” Ms. Griner’s lawyers said in a statement after the ruling by a three-judge panel of an appeals court near Moscow. “The verdict contains numerous defects, and we hoped that the court of appeal would take them into consideration.”</p> <p>The decision means Ms. Griner will begin serving her sentence soon, but it was not immediately clear if her legal options were exhausted. There are two higher courts above the appellate division, culminating in the Supreme Court, but Ms. Griner’s lawyers said they had not decided whether to take the case any further.</p> <p>“We need to discuss this with our client,” the statement said. “We generally think that we must use all the available legal tools, especially given the harsh and unprecedented nature of her verdict.”</p> <p>Higher courts in Russia also are not known for overturning verdicts, especially in a case involving foreign policy and the interests of the Kremlin.</p> <p>President Biden’s national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, denounced the ruling as “another sham judicial proceeding” and said in a statement that Ms. Griner “should be released immediately.”</p> <p>The basketball star, 31, did not appear in court on Tuesday and participated in the proceedings via a video link from the detention center where she has been held since her arrest in February. Her lawyers said it could be a few months before she is moved to a penal colony.</p>

Since she was arrested at a Moscow airport days before Russia invaded Ukraine, Ms. Griner's fate has become entangled in the increasingly acrimonious relations between Moscow and Washington. As the Biden administration enforces harsh sanctions against President Vladimir V. Putin's government as punishment for the invasion, American officials have accused Russia of using Ms. Griner and other U.S. citizens in Russian custody as bargaining chips.

In July, the Biden administration offered a [prisoner swap](#) involving Ms. Griner, but Russian officials have said it was premature to discuss a deal while her case was underway. One person briefed on the talks said at the time that the United States had proposed exchanging Ms. Griner — along with Paul Whelan, a former Marine held since December 2018 — for [Viktor Bout](#), a Russian arms dealer serving a 25-year federal prison sentence for charges including conspiring to kill Americans.

Mr. Biden and Mr. Putin are both expected to attend a summit of Group of 20 leaders next month in Indonesia, and Mr. Biden has said he would only speak with the Russian leader there if it was to discuss Ms. Griner's case.

Bill Richardson, the former ambassador to the United Nations who has been unofficially negotiating with Russian officials as a private citizen, [said in October](#) that he was "cautiously optimistic" that Ms. Griner and Mr. Whelan could be exchanged before the end of the year.

But Russia is a stickler for bureaucratic proceedings, so it is unlikely that negotiating any exchange can begin in earnest until the judicial process has run its course.

Ms. Griner, an all-star center with the WNBA's Phoenix Mercury and a two-time Olympic gold medalist, was arrested on Feb. 17 in Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport, where she had arrived from the United States. She was en route to Yekaterinburg, a Russian city near the Ural Mountains, where she played for a women's basketball team. Customs officials in Moscow said they had found two vape cartridges containing hashish oil in her luggage and detained her.

Ms. Griner admitted her guilt in court but insisted that she had no intention to break the law, saying that the small amount of hashish oil appeared in her luggage because of negligence.

Since she was [sentenced in August](#), her lawyers have argued that the nine-year prison term — near the 10-year maximum for such a conviction — was too harsh for a first-time offense and was politically motivated.

In [an interview with "CBS Mornings"](#) this month, Ms. Griner's wife, Cherelle Griner, said that she had been able to speak to her only twice since she was detained and was increasingly worried about her. The most recent conversation, she said, was so troubling that she cried for two or three days afterward.

"It was the most disturbing phone call I'd ever experienced," she told the interviewer, Gayle King, adding that her wife worried about being abandoned in Russia.

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HEADLINE	10/25 Griner to serve sentence in penal colony
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/10/25/world/russia-ukraine-war-news#russia-penal-colony-brittney-griner
GIST	<p>Some prisoners are tortured, or beaten by fellow inmates. Some have to work 16-hour days. A few are forced to watch Russian propaganda on repeat.</p> <p>This is the world of the Russian penal colony, into which Brittney Griner is about to be inducted for a nine-year term.</p> <p>Penal colonies are the descendants of gulags, the notorious Stalin-era labor camps where millions of Russians lost their lives. The treatment of prisoners has improved markedly since then, according to rights groups. Ms. Griner's lawyers said on Tuesday that it could be "up to a few months" before she is</p>

transferred from the detention center where she has been held since being arrested in February on suspicion of drug smuggling.

But the penal colonies, many of them scattered across Siberia as gulags were and laid out in barracks, are still characterized by brutality, overcrowding and harsh conditions, and they are often governed by a rigid prison culture.

In an [interview from a penal colony](#) last year, Russia's most famous prisoner, the opposition leader Aleksei A. Navalny, described a schedule of calisthenics, sweeping the yard and games of chess or backgammon, as well as five daily sessions of screen time where inmates are forced to watch state television and propaganda films.

"You need to imagine something like a Chinese labor camp, where everybody marches in a line and where video cameras are hung everywhere," he said. "There is constant control and a culture of snitching."

In June, Mr. Navalny was transferred to a maximum-security prison, where he said he spends seven-hour shifts at a sewing machine.

In 2012, a member of the Russian punk band Pussy Riot [said that](#) there was no hot water, warm clothes or medicine in the penal colony where she and a bandmate were imprisoned, and that people who got sick could die as a result.

President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia said in 2010 that "The Gulag Archipelago," Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's indictment of the Soviet penal system, should be essential reading for Russian students.

During her detention so far, Ms. Griner's reading material has reportedly been books by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, a Russian writer whose work was marked by his harrowing experiences in the country's penal system, after he was sentenced to four years' hard labor in Siberia. Dostoyevsky once wrote: "The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons."

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HEADLINE	10/25 Ukraine downs Russia attack helicopters
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/10/25/world/russia-ukraine-war-news#russia-ukraine-attack-helicopters
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine — As Russia fights to slow Ukrainian counteroffensives in the east and the south, its military has increasingly turned to powerful attack helicopters to hit Ukrainian tanks on the move, destroy river crossings and strike infantry positions, according to military analysts.</p> <p>The gunships have become a major target for the Ukrainian Air Force, and there is growing evidence that its efforts are taking a toll on the Russian fleet.</p> <p>Ukraine has shot down at least 23 Ka-52 Russian attack helicopters since Moscow invaded the country eight months ago, Britain's defense intelligence agency said on Tuesday.</p> <p>"This represents over 25 percent of the Russian Air Force's in-service fleet of 90 Ka-52s, and nearly half of Russia's total helicopter losses in Ukraine," the agency said on Twitter.</p> <p>The agency did not disclose the source of its figures. But they mirror those of the independent military analysis site Oryx, which tracks destroyed Russian and Ukrainian aerial assets, and says it has evidence that 23 Ka-52s have been shot down or destroyed. The group also says that it has documented the loss of 31 additional Russian attack and transport helicopters since Moscow's full-scale invasion began in February, although it says the total number is likely "significantly higher."</p> <p>In the past two weeks, the Ukrainian military says, it has shot down nearly a dozen Russian helicopters, including four in an 18-minute span on Oct. 12. The claims could not be immediately verified.</p>

	<p>The failure of Russia to control the skies over Ukraine has plagued its military campaign from the outset of the war. With artillery ammunition running low in places, the British intelligence agency said, Russian commanders “are likely increasingly resorting to conducting high-risk attack helicopter missions as one of the few options available to provide close support for troops in combat.”</p> <p>The two main Russian attack helicopters, the Ka-52 and the Mil Mi-28, are able to fire laser-guided missiles. Before firing, a gunship often must hover a few hundred feet off the ground to direct a laser at a target that could be as far as six miles away, leaving themselves briefly exposed.</p> <p>Aerial losses for both sides have continued to mount in the war, and Russia still has vastly more firepower in the sky than Ukraine does.</p> <p>While the United States has resisted calls to provide fighter jets to Ukraine, it has supplied at least 20 Mi-17 multi-purpose transport helicopters. Latvia, Slovakia and the Czech Republic have donated helicopters, including gunships, to Ukraine.</p> <p>Oryx has documented the loss of at least 14 Ukrainian helicopters since the start of the war.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/25 Inquiries into Nord Stream pipeline blasts
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/25/world/europe/nord-stream-pipeline-explosions.html
GIST	<p>After midnight on a Monday in late September, seismographs in Sweden suddenly picked up a violent disturbance that jolted the floor of the Baltic Sea south of the rocky island of Bornholm, a onetime Viking outpost that is a part of Denmark.</p> <p>Hours later — at 7 p.m. local time — it happened again: a series of underwater explosions farther off the island’s northeastern coast.</p> <p>The next morning, photographs showed enormous blooms of methane bubbling on the ocean surface above both explosion sites, confirming reports of a severe loss of pressure in Nord Stream 1 and 2, the natural gas lines linking Russia and Germany.</p> <p>Now, a month after subsea explosions ripped holes in the Nord Stream pipelines, in busy international waters, the leakage has stopped, the first underwater images of the twisted metal and severed openings have been published and three countries have investigations underway.</p> <p>But beyond acknowledging that explosives were used in acts of deliberate sabotage, investigators have disclosed few details of their findings. Amid rampant speculation about who carried out the explosions — was it the Russians trying to rattle the West, the Americans trying to sever a Russian economic artery or possibly the Ukrainians trying to take revenge on Russia? — what is known remains as cloudy as the images from the floor of the Baltic Sea.</p> <p>Denmark, Germany and Sweden have launched separate investigations into the leaks — Denmark and Sweden because the explosions occurred in waters that were within their so-called exclusive economic zones, and Germany because that is where the pipelines terminate.</p> <p>In a letter to the U.N. Security Council from Sept. 29, three days after the incidents, Denmark and Sweden said they believed that “several hundred kilograms” of explosives had been used to damage the pipes, each of which measures more than three-and-a-half feet in diameter and is made from steel encased in weighted concrete.</p> <p>All three countries are refusing to release any more information. The acute geopolitical tensions surrounding the blasts — coming amid the fierce fighting in Ukraine and an economic war between Moscow and the West — have heightened the caution.</p>

“There is a lot of secrecy still going on,” said Jens Wenzel Kristoffersen, a commander in the Danish Navy and a military analyst at the Center for Military Studies at the University of Copenhagen. “The reason is simply because they have to be absolutely sure. When they have results, they have to be based on quite hard-core facts and not just speculation.”

Commander Kristoffersen said he believed it was unlikely that any of the investigators would make an announcement “until they have this smoking-gun evidence.”

Tentative or uncoordinated findings, he added, “could lead to reactions which would not be helpful at this point of time.”

The German government stressed that the complexity of the forensic examination of the damage sites “will almost certainly not allow any short-term, reliable statements to be made about the authorship,” or who carried out the attacks.

The pipelines are owned by Gazprom, Russia’s state-owned natural gas monopoly. (Minority stakes in Nord Stream 1 are held by four other energy companies: Wintershall Dea and E.ON, both based in Germany, Gasunie in the Netherlands and Engie in France.)

Russian officials have complained that they have been blocked from investigating the explosion sites. The Kremlin spokesman, Dmitri S. Peskov, accused the Europeans of conducting the investigation “secretively,” without Moscow’s involvement. “According to statements we are hearing from Germany, from France and from Denmark, this investigation was set up inherently to put the blame on Russia,” [Reuters quoted Mr. Peskov](#) as saying.

The twin 760-mile-long pipelines, stretching from the northwest coast of Russia to Lubmin, in northeastern Germany, have always been the focus of international tension. [The original Nord Stream](#), completed in 2011 at a cost of more than \$12 billion, was criticized as an expensive way for Gazprom to ship gas to Germany while avoiding paying transit fees in Ukraine.

Years later, the idea of Nord Stream 2, a sibling pipeline that would double the original’s capacity, was condemned by many Central and Eastern European countries, as well as by the United States, which warned that it would permit Moscow to tighten Germany’s reliance on Russian gas. Although the \$11 billion pipeline was completed last year, German authorities shelved it just before Russia invaded Ukraine in February.

Although the newer pipeline has never been used, and the original one has not delivered gas since July because of what Gazprom calls technical issues, both were filled with highly pressurized methane to help the pipes withstand water pressure on the floor of the sea. Both Nord Streams are composed of two strands of pipe running along the seafloor. The explosions caused leaks along both strands of Nord Stream 1, but in only one strand of Nord Stream 2. Its other strand remains intact.

Murky images published last week by the [Swedish tabloid Expressen](#) pointed to the force of the explosion that hit Nord Stream 1, seeming to show that several segments of pipe were severed from the main pipeline.

Trond Larsen, a submersible drone operator whose images were commissioned by the Swedish newspaper, pointed out that, when the pipes burst, the highly pressurized gas — up to nearly 3,200 pounds per square inch — disturbed the seabed, appearing to bury parts of the damaged pipe.

“I believe we saw the part of the pipe going west still buried in the seafloor, the end of the pipe going east lifted up from the seafloor,” Mr. Larsen said in a telephone interview. He said there was very little debris in the area, perhaps because the rush of gas had pushed it all away, or it had already been removed by the Swedish investigators.

Last week, German investigators also sent a vessel equipped with underwater drones and a diving robot to comb the seafloor in the same area for more evidence of the explosion.

Danish authorities have not yet lifted their restrictions in their economic waters above the explosion site, which were sealed off to shipping traffic as a safety precaution.

The explosions took place in a busy maritime corridor that is frequented by fishing boats, merchant traffic and military vessels from the nations that border the Baltic Sea as well as NATO partners, including the United States.

Since the blasts, patrols have increased in the Baltic and the North Sea, which is home to a vast network of cables and pipelines connecting Norway — Europe’s most important energy exporter since Russia invaded Ukraine — to Britain and the European mainland. Security is also high along a recently opened pipeline, [Baltic Pipe](#), which carries Norwegian gas to Poland, crossing the Nord Stream arteries on the seabed not far from the explosion sites.

This month, Mr. Putin told an energy conference in Russia that delivering natural gas to Europe through the remaining strand of Nord Stream 2 would be a matter of “just turning on the tap.” His statement echoed those he made last October, as he urged [Germans to approve](#) the pipeline.

Days later, Alexei Miller, Gazprom’s chairman, in comments made to Russia’s Channel One television station, floated the idea that it would possibly be faster to rebuild the pipeline than to repair it. At the same time, he acknowledged that any such move would require interest from Germany, as well as resolving regulatory, legal and sanctions issues.

After years of ignoring the protests from their neighbors in Central and Eastern Europe — some of whom share borders with Russia and have a long history of dealing with Moscow — Germany’s leaders have recognized the mistake of letting their country’s powerful economy become overly dependent on Russian gas.

Investments are now focused instead on securing and connecting floating terminals for shipments of liquefied natural gas from the United States and elsewhere. One of the new terminals is to be built off the coast of Lubmin, allowing the onshore pipelines that were previously used to receive Russian gas through Nord Stream to carry L.N.G.

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HEADLINE	10/25 Seattle sunsets mark milestone: ‘Big Dark’
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/weather/hello-big-dark-wednesday-is-years-final-sunset-as-late-as-6-p-m/
GIST	<p>Seattle giveth and Seattle taketh away.</p> <p>The sun will set at 6 p.m. for the last time of the year Wednesday, ushering in the gloomy wet season that some National Weather Service staffers refer to as “The Big Dark.”</p> <p>It’s this time of year when we pay for those summer evenings when the sun didn’t set until 8 or 9 p.m. Daylight saving time will end in less than two weeks, fast-forwarding our sunsets to 4:44 p.m., according to timeanddate.com.</p> <p>From then on, residents of the so-called Emerald City won’t see daylight after 5 p.m. until Jan. 25.</p> <p>That will come, of course, after December’s winter solstice, when the sun will set at a grim 4:20 p.m. At about 47 degrees latitude, Seattle gets fewer than 8 ½ hours of daylight on the shortest day of the year, Dec. 21.</p>

	<p>As our sunsets creep earlier, Seattle weather is also expected to trend wetter. After a record-breaking dry and warm start to October, the weather is finally turning toward typical rainy days with highs in the 50s.</p> <p>It was only just over a week ago, mind you, when Seattle's high was 88 degrees.</p> <p>Maybe we can all set alarms for March 5 and sleep until then. The sun will set at 6 p.m. that day.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/25 US secret Saudi oil deal? Or so thought
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/25/us/politics/us-saudi-oil-deal.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — As President Joe Biden was planning a politically risky trip to Saudi Arabia this summer, his top aides thought they had struck a secret deal to boost oil production through the end of the year — an arrangement that could have helped justify breaking a campaign pledge to shun the kingdom and its crown prince.</p> <p>It didn't work out that way.</p> <p>Biden went through with the trip. But earlier this month, Saudi Arabia and Russia steered a group of oil-producing countries in voting to slash oil production by 2 million barrels per day, the opposite of the outcome the administration thought it had secured as the Democratic Party struggles to deal with inflation and high gas prices heading into the November elections.</p> <p>The move led angry Biden administration officials to reassess America's relationship with the kingdom and produced a flurry of accusatory statements between the two governments — including a charge by the White House that Saudi Arabia was helping Russia in its war in Ukraine.</p> <p>Lawmakers who had been told about the trip's benefits in classified briefings and other conversations that included details of the oil deal — which has not been previously disclosed and was supposed to lead to a surge in production between September and December — have been left fuming that Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman duped the administration.</p> <p>This account is based on interviews with U.S. officials and officials from Gulf Arab nations, as well as Middle East experts with knowledge of discussions between the two nations.</p> <p>What happened over the past half-year is a story of handshake agreements, wishful thinking, missed signals and finger-pointing over broken promises. Far from rebuilding a relationship with a leader Biden had once pledged to treat as a “pariah” after the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, the outcome has been another low point in America's tumultuous ties with Saudi Arabia.</p> <p>The episode is also a revealing example of how Saudi Arabia, under the leadership of its ambitious and often ruthless crown prince, appears eager to shed some of its longtime reliance on the United States, with Crown Prince Mohammed trying to position Saudi Arabia as a powerhouse of its own.</p> <p>U.S. officials said that, even days before the OPEC+ decision, they had received assurances from the crown prince there would be no production cuts — and when they learned of the Saudi reversal, they made a futile last-ditch push to change minds in the royal court.</p> <p>The Saudi Energy Ministry said in a statement that “the kingdom rejects these allegations and stresses that such mischaracterizations made by anonymous sources are entirely false.”</p> <p>The ministry added, “The decisions of OPEC Plus are reached by the consensus of all members and determined solely by market fundamentals, not politics.”</p> <p>White House officials admit they were angered and surprised by what they said was a Saudi about-face, but insist their overall strategy to lower energy costs is working.</p>

At the same time, U.S. officials are bracing for another potential price surge in December, if a European embargo on Russian oil goes into effect and the Saudis refuse to increase oil production to make up for the anticipated reduction in supply. The officials say that would be a sure sign that the Saudis were helping the Russians by undermining the American and European-led plan.

“While we clearly disagreed with the OPEC Plus decision in early October, we recognize the importance of continuing to work and communicate with Saudi Arabia and other producers to ensure a stable and fair global energy market,” said Amos Hochstein, Biden’s energy envoy. Some analysts say that senior American and Saudi officials have misread each other on both the dynamics of the oil market and the geopolitics around Russia, and that the Biden administration will have a hard time figuring out how things went awry.

“Deconstructing Saudi decision-making right now is like Kremlinology on steroids,” said Hussein Ibish, a scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington. “It’s become a matter of a relative handful of people around the king and the crown prince.”

“Even the most well-informed people in the United States often don’t know,” he added.

The White House has indicated it might seek retribution for the Saudi decision, and some Democrats in Congress are making a push to scale back some military and economic ties to the kingdom. Even some of the president’s staunchest supporters have called the episode an example of the administration sacrificing principles for political expediency — and having little to show for it.

“There’s now a level of embarrassment as the Saudis merrily go on their way,” said Rep. Gerald E. Connolly, D-Va., a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Fist Bump in Jeddah

Biden administration officials began planning in the spring for the president to make a summit stop in Saudi Arabia while also visiting Israel over the summer. They knew such a trip would bring criticism: Biden had denounced Crown Prince Mohammed during the presidential campaign, had ordered the declassification of an intelligence assessment that the prince likely ordered the killing of Khashoggi and had thus far in his presidency refused to have a one-on-one meeting with the crown prince.

But some of the president’s aides saw both short- and long-term benefits for the trip and had quietly tried to repair the relationship. They said it was important to work with the kingdom on the Yemen war and Iran, and to expand Israel’s acceptance in the region. More immediately, they believed, the trip could shore up a Saudi commitment to convince OPEC to increase oil production as Russia’s war in Ukraine had led to surging global fuel prices.

Leading proponents of the visit, including Hochstein and Brett McGurk, the top National Security Council official for Middle East policy, met during the spring with Crown Prince Mohammed and his advisers. American officials said that in May, they reached a private oil deal with the Saudis that had two parts.

First, the Saudis would accelerate an OPEC+ production increase of 400,000 barrels per day already planned for September, moving it to July and August. Then the Saudis would get the cartel to announce a further production increase of 200,000 barrels per day for each month from September to December of this year.

On June 2, OPEC+ announced they would move up the production increase scheduled for September — fulfilling the first part of the secret deal.

That same day, the White House announced Biden would soon make a trip to Saudi Arabia.

Democratic lawmakers remained skeptical of the efforts at rapprochement. Rep. Adam Schiff, D-Calif., the chair of the House intelligence committee, said publicly that Biden should not travel to the kingdom.

He and five other senior Democratic House members sent a letter June 7 to Biden urging him to take a more guarded approach to Saudi Arabia — the most immediate issue, they said, was that “Saudi Arabia’s refusal to stabilize global energy markets is helping bankroll Vladimir Putin’s war crimes in Ukraine.” The White House agreed to give the lawmakers classified briefings about their diplomatic efforts on a range of issues, including the Yemen war, Iran and Saudi Arabia’s relations with Israel. In briefings and talks with members of the congressional intelligence and foreign affairs committees, McGurk and Hochstein laid out the elements of a variety of agreements they had brokered with the Saudis, including the oil production boost aimed at bringing down prices.

For Democratic lawmakers who attended the briefings, this apparent pledge from the Saudis promised relief both for American consumers being pummeled by inflation, and for Biden and his embattled party as they headed into the November elections.

The price of oil was slowly dropping by the time Biden arrived in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on July 15 for his meeting with Crown Prince Mohammed and other Arab leaders. The image of the American president bumping fists with the Saudi crown prince he once vilified endures from the trip, but behind the scenes, White House officials believed they had at least shored up Saudi commitments on a number of fronts.

Saudis officials seemed eager to demonstrate to the Americans that they had delivered on their commitments — during the summit, they gave members of Biden’s delegation a chart showing oil prices had fallen to \$101 per barrel, down from more than \$120 per barrel after the war in Ukraine began.

October Surprise

The Americans came away from the summit with the belief that the agreement was on track and that Crown Prince Mohammed was satisfied. But in Riyadh, top Saudi officials were privately telling others that they had no plans for further meaningful oil production increases. Indeed, the first public warning of this came Aug. 3, when OPEC+ announced a paltry bump in production for September of 100,000 barrels a day — half of what U.S. officials believed the Saudis had promised them.

American officials said they did not understand why that decision was made. Then OPEC+ announced on Sept. 5 it would cut production by 100,000 barrels per day — retracting the increase it had announced a month earlier. After that, U.S. officials were increasingly confused and concerned about the kingdom’s direction.

In late September, American officials began hearing that Saudi Arabia could get OPEC+ to announce a deep cut to oil production at a meeting scheduled for Oct. 5. U.S. officials scrambled to get Crown Prince Mohammed to back away from any such move.

On Sept. 24, American officials met in person in the kingdom with Crown Prince Mohammed and his brother Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman, the Saudi energy minister. During the meeting, Crown Prince Mohammed assured the Americans that there would be no production cuts, according to U.S. officials with direct knowledge of what transpired.

But four days after that, the White House learned the crown prince had done the opposite: Saudi officials notified the Americans that Saudi Arabia would back production cuts at the OPEC+ meeting, which took place in Vienna.

The White House dispatched Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen to speak by phone to Mohammed al-Jadaan, the Saudi finance minister, to argue against the production cut, but that failed to sway the Saudis.

American officials say they believe that Crown Prince Mohammed was particularly influenced by a high-level Sept. 27 meeting in which Prince Abdulaziz, the energy minister, argued that oil production cuts were needed to keep prices from plummeting to as low as \$50 per barrel. The U.S. officials said they learned Prince Abdulaziz asserted that, under such a scenario, the Saudi government would lack the resources to fund economic diversification projects at the heart of Crown Prince Mohammed’s domestic agenda.

Some U.S. officials believe that the Russians influenced the Saudi about-face, pointing to Prince Abdulaziz's strong working ties with top Russian officials close to Putin, particularly Alexander Novak, the deputy prime minister who oversees energy policy.

Saudi officials vehemently denied marching in lock step with Russia and said they have viewed themselves as a neutral mediator in Russia's war with Ukraine. Some American officials said that an answer to whether Riyadh has truly cast its lot with Moscow will come on Dec. 4, when OPEC+ is scheduled to meet again. The White House is working with European allies to implement a partial embargo and price cap on Russian oil sales beginning in December. Their goal is to deprive Moscow of resources and to increase pressure on Putin to end the war in Ukraine, while keeping global oil supplies stable.

But much hinges on what the Saudis choose to do. If they refuse to announce a production increase at that December meeting — around the time when Russian oil could come off the market — oil prices might surge, undermining Biden's efforts against Russia and stoking global inflation.

On Tuesday, speaking on stage at the annual investment forum in Riyadh, Prince Abdulaziz said that the kingdom would do what was in its best interests.

"I keep listening to, 'Are you with us or against us?' Is there any room for, 'We are for Saudi Arabia and the people of Saudi Arabia'?" he said. "We will have to deliver our ambitions."

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HEADLINE	10/25 Moderate quake in San Francisco Bay Area
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/magnitude-5-1-quake-strikes-in-san-francisco-bay-area/
GIST	<p>SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — A magnitude 5.1 earthquake rattled the San Francisco Bay Area on Tuesday, causing delays of some commuter trains. There were no immediate reports of damage or injuries.</p> <p>The U.S. Geological Survey said the 11:42 a.m. quake was centered 12 miles (19 kilometers) east of San Jose at a depth of about 4 miles (6 kilometers). The area is hill country about 40 miles (64 kilometers) southeast of downtown San Francisco.</p> <p>Lucy Jones, a veteran California seismologist, told KNTV-TV that the quake happened on the Calaveras fault, one of eight major faults in the Bay Area.</p> <p>"The Calaveras fault is one that tends to have smaller earthquakes," Jones said.</p> <p>It was the largest earthquake in the Bay Area since a magnitude 6.0 jolt in the Napa wine country in 2014, Jones said in a social media post.</p> <p>The 138-mile (220-kilometer) long Calaveras fault is a major branch of the San Andreas fault and runs from San Juan Bautista in the south to San Ramon in the north, Jones said.</p> <p>Numerous moderate earthquakes have occurred along the Calaveras fault, including the 6.2 Morgan Hill earthquake in 1984, Annemarie Baltay, a seismologist with the U.S. Geological Survey, said in a video statement posted on Twitter.</p> <p>Rich Constantine, the mayor of Morgan Hill, a city next to San Jose, said he was in the kitchen of his home when Tuesday's "long and steady" quake struck.</p> <p>"We had a frame in the house fall, everything was shaking but once it stopped, there was no damage," he said.</p> <p>Constantine said Morgan Hill's City Hall and other city offices were evacuated but that everyone returned to work soon after.</p>

	<p>People reported feeling the quake as far south as the scenic Big Sur coast, 75 miles (120 kilometers) south of the epicenter in the region of Joseph Grant Ranch County Park, a huge natural area.</p> <p>Nearly 100,000 people reported receiving a warning before the shaking started through California's earthquake early warning system, according to the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services, or Cal OES.</p> <p>"Advance notice varied from two seconds for those very near the epicenter to 18 seconds for those in San Francisco," the agency said.</p> <p>MyShake, a statewide cellphone app that went live to the general public in late 2019, relies on an earthquake detection and notification system developed by the U.S. Geological Survey and partners.</p> <p>A 3.1 aftershock followed about 5 minutes later, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.</p> <p>Several commuter train companies, including Cal Train and the Bay Area Rapid Transit system, known as BART, held trains to check for damage. BART returned to normal service by early afternoon.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/25 USFS chief decries arrest of 'burn boss'
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/forest-service-boss-decries-arrest-of-worker-in-planned-burn/
GIST	<p>SALEM, Ore. (AP) — The head of the U.S. Forest Service has denounced the arrest by an Oregon sheriff of a Forest Service employee after a planned burn in a national forest spread onto private land.</p> <p>The criticism by Forest Service Chief Randy Moore was followed by a statement from Grant County District Attorney Jim Carpenter in which he defended the arrest on Oct. 19 of a U.S. Forest Service "burn boss" on allegations of reckless burning.</p> <p>"I respect the sheriff's discretion and decision to make an arrest in this case," Carpenter said Tuesday. Sheriff Todd McKinley occasionally briefs Carpenter on an investigation into the case, the prosecutor said, adding that it could last for weeks or even months.</p> <p>Once it's completed, "a decision will be made as to whether a charge will be made or not," Carpenter said.</p> <p>Burn Boss Randy Snodgrass told the local Blue Mountain Eagle newspaper that his arrest by McKinley disrupted the chain of command while the Forest Service crew was conducting the prescribed burn in the Malheur National Forest. Snodgrass was taken to the county jail in Canyon City, where he was conditionally released.</p> <p>"Other individuals were able to pick up the slack, fortunately, that were well-trained," Snodgrass said. "He put not only my guys at risk out there, their safety, but he put that land at risk, as well as all of Bear Valley."</p> <p>Prescribed burns are set intentionally and under carefully controlled conditions to clear underbrush, pine needle beds and other surface fuels that make forests more prone to wildfires.</p> <p>McKinley said the prescribed fire burned about 20 acres (8 hectares) of land belonging to the Holliday family before it was brought under control. But Chad Holliday estimated that almost 40 acres (16 hectares) of the family property was burned.</p> <p>In a message, posted Monday to all the U.S. Forest Service's more than 25,000 employees, Moore said he won't "stand idly by without fully defending the Burn Boss and all employees carrying out their official duties as federal employees."</p>

	<p>“In my opinion, this arrest was highly inappropriate under these circumstances,” Moore said on the agency’s website.</p> <p>The arrest underscored simmering tensions over management of federal lands in rural, conservative eastern Oregon.</p> <p>In 2016, right-wing militants staged an armed takeover of a federal wildlife refuge in adjacent Harney County to protest the treatment of ranchers Steven Hammond and his father, Dwight, who were both convicted of arson for setting fire to federal range land and sent to prison. They were freed early after being pardoned by then President Donald Trump.</p> <p>Carpenter has warned that Snodgrass’ federal employment “will not protect him if it is determined that he acted recklessly,” adding it may raise the standard to which he will be held.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/25 Home-price growth slows most on record 10/25 Seattle-area home prices tumble
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/u-s-home-price-growth-slows-most-on-record-as-market-hits-brakes/
GIST	<p><i>Bloomberg</i> - Home-price growth in the U.S. slowed the most on record as a doubling of borrowing costs has sapped demand.</p> <p>A national measure of prices increased 13% in August from a year earlier, down from 15.6% in July, the S&P CoreLogic Case-Shiller index showed Tuesday. That’s the biggest deceleration in the index’s history.</p> <p>The housing market has started to slump as the Federal Reserve hikes interest rates to curb the hottest inflation in decades. Even with the deceleration, prices remain high compared to last year. Coupled with mortgage rates that are edging closer to 7%, many would-be buyers have been shut out, while some sellers have retreated.</p> <p>“The forceful deceleration in US housing prices that we noted a month ago continued,” Craig Lazzara, a managing director at S&P Dow Jones Indices, said in the statement. “Given the continuing prospects for a challenging macroeconomic environment, home prices may well continue to decelerate.”</p> <p>A measure of year-over-year price growth in 20 U.S. cities gained 13.1% in August, down from the 16% increase in July. All of those cities posted lower price increases in the year ended August as compared to the year ended July. Miami and Tampa, Florida, as well as Charlotte, North Carolina, posted the biggest gains.</p> <p>Seattle-area prices were up 9.9% year over year, according to the index, which tracks single-family home prices in areas of King, Snohomish and Pierce counties. But of the 20 metro areas the index tracks, Seattle saw among the largest month-to-month price drops from July to August at 3.9%. Only San Francisco saw a larger decline: 4.3%.</p> <p>The analysis tracks with other research. In September, Redfin found Seattle was the fastest cooling market in the country, likely because higher interest rates are squeezing buyers who were already on the edge of being able to afford the region’s high home prices. In September, the median single-family home in King County sold for \$875,000, according to the Northwest Multiple Listing Service.</p> <p>The market’s shift in recent months has started to cool the pandemic boom, when houses were quickly snapped up. Sales of existing homes fell for an eighth straight month in September, according to National Association of Realtors data, while new home construction also dropped in September, according to recent government data.</p> <p>“As we move into the colder months of the year, we can expect further declines in home sales and continued downward adjustment in prices,” said George Ratiu, manager of economic research at Realtor.com.</p>

	Homebuilders have been hit by the sudden market slowdown. PulteGroup Inc. reported Tuesday that canceled deals spiked and third-quarter orders plunged as demand faltered.
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HEADLINE	10/25 Putin urges boost weapons production
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/german-president-arrives-ukraine-tensions-rise-92044053
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine -- Russian President Vladimir Putin, facing military production delays and mounting losses, urged his government Tuesday to cut through bureaucracy to crank out enough weapons and supplies to feed the war in Ukraine, where a Western-armed Ukrainian counteroffensive has set back Russia's forces.</p> <p>In other developments, Ukrainian authorities asked citizens not to return home and further tax the country's battered energy infrastructure, and Western countries mulled how to rebuild Ukraine when the war ends.</p> <p>The Russian military's shortfalls in the eight-month war have been so pronounced that Putin had to create a structure to try to address them. On Tuesday, he chaired a new committee designed to accelerate the production and delivery of weapons and supplies for Russian troops, stressing the need to "gain higher tempo in all areas."</p> <p>Russian news reports have acknowledged that many of those called up under a mobilization of 300,000 reservists Putin ordered haven't been provided with basic equipment such as medical kits and flak jackets, and had to find their own. Other reports have suggested that Russian troops are increasingly forced to use old and sometimes unreliable equipment and that some of the newly mobilized troops are rushed to the war front with little training. Last week, Putin tried to show all is well by visiting a training site in Russia where he was shown well equipped soldiers.</p> <p>To substitute for increasingly scarce Russian-made long-range precision weapons, Britain's Ministry of Defense said Russia was likely to use a large number of drones to try to penetrate Ukrainian air defenses. Russia's "artillery ammunition is running low," the British report said Tuesday.</p> <p>The Institute for the Study of War, in Washington, added that "the slower tempo of Russian air, missile, and drone strikes possibly reflects decreasing missile and drone stockpiles and the strikes' limited effectiveness of accomplishing Russian strategic military goals."</p> <p>The Russian military has still managed to inflict heavy damage and casualties, ruining homes, public buildings and Ukraine's power grid. The World Bank estimates the damage to Ukraine so far at 350 billion euros (\$345 billion).</p> <p>Recent Russian attacks have focused largely on Ukraine's energy facilities, especially electricity generation and transmission. Electricity shortfalls are so severe that Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Irina Vereshchuk on Tuesday asked citizens living abroad not to return this winter to avoid placing further strain on the power supply.</p> <p>"We need to survive the winter but, unfortunately, the (electricity) networks will not survive," Vereshchuk said on Ukrainian television. "We understand that the situation will only get worse, and this winter we need to survive."</p> <p>In Berlin, European Union leaders brought together experts to work on a "new Marshall Plan" for rebuilding Ukraine — a reference to the U.S.-sponsored plan that helped revive Western European economies after World War II.</p> <p>German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said the meeting is addressing "how to ensure and how to sustain the financing of the recovery, reconstruction and modernization of Ukraine for years and decades to come."</p>

Scholz, who co-hosted the meeting with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, said he's looking for "nothing less than creating a new Marshall Plan for the 21st century — a generational task that must begin now."

On the diplomatic front, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier told reporters in Kyiv after meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Tuesday that his country will continue to stand by Ukraine's side in this war and support its people as long as it takes — by helping to rebuild the destroyed country and sending more weapons.

"Reconstruction is not waiting for the war to end. It must begin now," the German president said, adding that "not only is Germany helping with the reconstruction, but we're also helping Ukraine to prevent the brutal destruction, to make sure that the population is protected in the best possible way."

He promised that Germany would help rebuild destroyed towns immediately and send two more MARS Medium Artillery Missile Systems and four type 2000 self-propelled howitzers.

On the battlefield, Russian missiles set a gas station on fire late Tuesday in the south-central city of Dnipro, killing a pregnant woman in her car and the operator of a car wash at the facility, while wounding at least three, Ukrainian news agencies reported.

In the southern city of Mykolaiv, residents lined up for water and essential supplies Tuesday as Ukrainian forces advanced on the nearby Russian-occupied city of Kherson.

One of Moscow's allies on Tuesday urged Russia to step up the pace and scale of Ukraine's destruction.

Ramzan Kadyrov, the regional leader of Chechnya who has sent troops to fight in Ukraine, urged Moscow to wipe off the map entire cities in retaliation for Ukrainian shelling of Russia's territory. Authorities in Russia's Kursk and Belgorod regions that border Ukraine have repeatedly reported Ukrainian shelling that has damaged infrastructure and residential buildings.

"Our response has been too weak," Kadyrov said on his messaging app channel. "If a shell flies into our region, entire cities must be wiped off the face of the Earth so that they don't ever think that they can fire in our direction."

Kyiv wants to step up the fight, but says it needs more war materiel.

"We need more weaponry, we need more ammunition to win this war," Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal told reporters in Berlin. He added: "We need tanks from our partners, from all of our partners; we need heavy armored vehicles, we need additional artillery units, howitzers."

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HEADLINE	10/25 New Zealand parliament majority women
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/zealand-women-lawmakers-outnumber-men-time-92098151
GIST	<p>WELLINGTON, New Zealand -- For the first time in New Zealand's history, a majority of lawmakers are women.</p> <p>Soraya Peke-Mason from the liberal Labour Party was sworn in to Parliament on Tuesday, replacing former Speaker Trevor Mallard, who left to become ambassador to Ireland. With the resignation of another male lawmaker, it has tipped the balance in Parliament to 60 women and 59 men.</p> <p>"Whilst it's a special day for me, I think it's historic for New Zealand," Peke-Mason told reporters.</p>

The milestone places New Zealand among a half-dozen nations in the world that this year can claim at least 50% female representation in their parliaments, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Other nations include Cuba, Mexico, Nicaragua, Rwanda and the United Arab Emirates.

Globally, about 26% of lawmakers are women, according to the union.

New Zealand has a history of strong female representation. In 1893, it became the first nation to allow women to vote. Current Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern is the nation's third female leader, and women currently also hold a number of other top roles including chief justice of New Zealand's Supreme Court and governor-general.

"I'm just really pleased that my daughters are growing up in a country where women being equally represented in public life is just normal," said Nicola Willis, the deputy leader of the conservative National Party.

Marama Davidson, co-leader of the liberal Green Party, was more blunt.

"About blimmin' time," she told reporters.

Ardern cautioned that the situation for women in many other countries was precarious.

"As we step forward, it feels as if we watch so many women experiencing a rapid slide backwards in progress," she said.

And reaching gender parity could prove only transitory. Opinion polls indicate that New Zealand's conservative parties, which currently have a lower proportion of women than their liberal rivals, are poised to make gains during next year's general election.

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HEADLINE	10/25 Ukraine: Russia secret work nuclear plant
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/ukraine-nuclear-agency-thickens-alleged-dirty-bomb-plot-92052194
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine -- Ukraine's nuclear energy operator said Tuesday that Russian forces were performing secret work at Europe's largest nuclear power plant, activity that could shed light on Russia's claims that the Ukrainian military is preparing a "provocation" involving a radioactive device.</p> <p>Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu made an unsubstantiated allegation that Ukraine was preparing to launch a so-called dirty bomb. Shoigu leveled the charge over the weekend in calls to his British, French, Turkish and U.S. counterparts. Britain, France and the United States rejected it out of hand as "transparently false."</p> <p>Ukraine also dismissed Moscow's claim as an attempt to distract attention from the Kremlin's own alleged plans to detonate a dirty bomb, which uses explosives to scatter radioactive waste in an effort to sow terror.</p> <p>Energoatom, the Ukrainian state enterprise that operates the country's four nuclear power plants, said Russian forces have carried out secret construction work over the last week at the occupied Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant in Ukraine.</p> <p>Russian officers controlling the area won't give access to Ukrainian staff running the plant or monitors from the U.N.'s atomic energy watchdog that would allow them to see what the Russians are doing, Energoatom said Tuesday in a statement.</p>

Energoatom said it “assumes” the Russians “are preparing a terrorist act using nuclear materials and radioactive waste stored at” the plant. It said there were 174 containers at the plant’s dry spent fuel storage facility, each of them containing 24 assemblies of spent nuclear fuel.

“Destruction of these containers as a result of explosion will lead to a radiation accident and radiation contamination of several hundred square kilometers (miles) of the adjacent territory,” the company said.

It called on the International Atomic Energy Agency to assess what was going on.

The U.N. Security Council held closed-door consultations Tuesday about the dirty-bomb allegations at Russia’s request.

Russia’s U.N. Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia sent a five-page letter to council members before the meeting claiming that according to the Russian Ministry of Defense, Ukraine’s Institute for Nuclear Research of the National Academy of Sciences in Kyiv and Vostochniy Mining and Processing Plant “have received direct orders from (President Volodymyr) Zelenskyy’s regime to develop such a dirty bomb” and “the works are at their concluding stage.”

Nebenzia said the ministry also received word that this work “may be carried out with the support of the Western countries.” And he warned that the authorities in Kyiv and their Western backers “will bear full responsibility for all the consequences” of using a “dirty bomb,” which Russia will regard as “an act of nuclear terrorism.”

Russia’s deputy U.N. ambassador Dmitry Polyansky was asked by reporters after the council meeting what evidence Russia has that Zelenskyy gave orders to develop a “dirty bomb.” He replied, “it is intelligence information.”

“We shared it in our telephone conversation with counterparts who have the necessary level of clearance,” he said. “Those who wanted to understand that the threat is serious, they had all the possibilities to understand that. Those who want to reject it as Russian propaganda, they will do it anyway.”

Polyansky said the IAEA can send inspectors to investigate allegations of a “dirty bomb.”

Britain’s deputy U.N. ambassador James Kariuki told reporters after the meeting that “we’ve seen and heard no new evidence” and the U.K., France and the U.S. made clear “this is a transparently false allegation” and “pure Russian misinformation.” He said, “Ukraine has been clear it’s got nothing to hide” and “IAEA inspectors are on the way.”

In a related matter, Russia asked the Security Council to establish a commission to investigate its claims that the United States and Ukraine are violating the convention prohibiting the use of biological weapons at laboratories in Ukraine.

Soon after Russia’s Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine, its U.N. ambassador, Vassily Nebenzia, claimed that secret American labs in Ukraine were engaged in biological warfare — a charge denied by the U.S. and Ukraine.

Russia has called a Security Council meeting Thursday on Ukraine’s biological laboratories and its allegations.

The Kremlin has insisted that its warning of a purported Ukrainian plan to use a dirty bomb should be taken seriously and criticized Western nations for shrugging it off.

The dismissal of Moscow’s warning is “unacceptable in view of the seriousness of the danger that we have talked about,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

	<p>Speaking during a conference call with reporters, Peskov added: "We again emphasize the grave danger posed by the plans hatched by the Ukrainians."</p> <p>At the White House, U.S. President Joe Biden was asked Tuesday if Russia is preparing to deploy a tactical nuclear weapon after making its claims that Ukraine will use a dirty bomb.</p> <p>"I spent a lot of time today talking about that," Biden told reporters.</p> <p>The president was also asked whether the claims about a Ukrainian dirty bomb amounted to a false-flag operation.</p> <p>"Let me just say, Russia would be making an incredibly serious mistake if it were to use a tactical nuclear weapon," Biden said. "I'm not guaranteeing you that it's a false-flag operation yet ... but it would be a serious, serious mistake."</p> <p>Dirty bombs don't have the devastating destruction of a nuclear explosion but could expose broad areas to radioactive contamination.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/25 Judge: NYC vaccine mandate 'capricious'
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/nycs-covid-vaccine-mandate-municipal-workers-arbitrary-capricious/story?id=92086236
GIST	<p>New York City's COVID vaccination mandate for municipal workers was "arbitrary and capricious," and those who were fired over it should be reinstated, according to a judge's ruling made public on Tuesday.</p> <p>Judge Ralph Porzio in Staten Island cited President Joe Biden's recent declaration the pandemic was over and a decision by New York Gov. Kathy Hochul not to renew the state's COVID-19 emergency.</p> <p>The ruling came in a case brought by 16 sanitation workers who were fired earlier this year over their refusal to get vaccinated but who claimed they had natural immunity because of prior infections.</p> <p>"Though vaccination should be encouraged, public employees should not have been terminated for their noncompliance," Porzio wrote in the ruling. "It is time for the city of New York to do what is right and what is just."</p> <p>The ruling said the fired workers were to have been reinstated Tuesday and were entitled to back pay. The city is appealing.</p> <p>"The city strongly disagrees with this ruling as the mandate is firmly grounded in law and is critical to New Yorkers' public health," a spokesman for the Law Department said in a statement. "We continue to review the court's decision, which conflicts with numerous other rulings already upholding the mandate."</p> <p>The ruling said the vaccine requirement violated the sanitation workers' due process rights, along with the separation of powers. The judge also criticized a decision in March to exempt athletes, artists and performers.</p> <p>"Granting exemptions for certain classes and selectively lifting vaccination orders, while maintaining others, is simply the definition of disparate treatment," the ruling said.</p> <p>Biden was asked about New York while getting his COVID booster on Tuesday and called it a "local judgment." His own vaccine mandates focused on the federal workforce and employees at large companies.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/25 Recall: Clorox Pine-Sol products
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SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/pine-sol-products-recalled-bacteria-exposure/story?id=92083719
GIST	<p>The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission announced Clorox is issuing a recall Tuesday of roughly 37 million Pine-Sol products over a possible bacteria contamination.</p> <p>The recall affects "Pine-Sol Scented Multi-Surface Cleaners in "Lavender Clean," "Sparkling Wave," and "Lemon Fresh" scents; "CloroxPro Pine-Sol All Purpose Cleaners" in "Lavender Clean," "Sparkling Wave," "Lemon Fresh" and "Orange Energy" scents; and "Clorox Professional Pine-Sol Lemon Fresh" cleaners.</p> <p>Original Pine-Sol (Pine scent) is not included in this recall, according to officials.</p> <p>The recall affects 37 million products that were sold between January 2021 and September 2022, which may contain the bacteria <i>Pseudomonas aeruginosa</i>, according to the CPSC.</p> <p>"People with weakened immune systems or external medical devices who are exposed to <i>Pseudomonas aeruginosa</i> face a risk of serious infection that may require medical treatment. The bacteria can enter the body if inhaled, through the eyes, or through a break in the skin. People with healthy immune systems are usually not affected by the bacteria," the agency said in a statement.</p> <p>Customers can identify the affected products by looking for date codes that are printed on the bottles. Customers with products with date codes labeled "A4" and followed by a five-digit number less than 22249 should dispose of the product in its container with household trash and contact Pine-Sol for a full refund of the purchase price, with receipt, or of the manufacturer's suggested retail price, without receipt, according to the CPSC.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/26 Australia health insurer data hacked
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/australian-health-insurer-says-data-of-all-customers-hacked/
GIST	<p>CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — Australia's largest health insurer said on Wednesday a cybercriminal had hacked the personal data of all its 4 million customers, as the government introduced legislation that would increase penalties for companies that fail to protect clients' private information.</p> <p>Medibank said "significant amounts of health claims data" had also been accessed in the breach, which was reported to police a week ago when trade in the company's shares was halted.</p> <p>The thief has demanded ransom and has reportedly threatened to expose the diagnoses and treatments of high-profile customers.</p> <p>Medibank said its priority was to discover the specific data stolen in relation to each customer and to share that information with those customers.</p> <p>The company had previously said the breach was thought to be limited to its subsidiary AHM and foreign students.</p> <p>"Our investigation has now established that this criminal has accessed all our private health insurance customers' personal data and significant amounts of their health claims data," Medibank chief executive David Koczkar said in a statement to the Australian Securities Exchange.</p> <p>"This is a terrible crime – this is a crime designed to cause maximum harm to the most vulnerable members of our community," Koczkar added, with an apology to customers.</p>

The government has been planning urgent legislative reforms on cybersecurity regulation since a hacker stole the personal data of almost 10 million current and former customers of Optus, Australia's second-largest wireless telecommunications carrier.

Optus became aware on Sept. 21 that personal data of more than one-third of Australia's population of 26 million had been stolen.

In introducing amendments to the Privacy Act to Parliament on Wednesday, Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus mentioned both companies and MyDeal, an online retail intermediary that lost the data of 2.2 million customers in a hack revealed two weeks ago.

"As the Optus, Medibank and MyDeal cyberattacks have recently highlighted, data breaches have the potential to cause serious financial and emotional harm to Australians, and this is unacceptable," Dreyfus told Parliament.

"Governments, businesses and other organizations have an obligation to protect Australians' personal data, not to treat it as a commercial asset," Dreyfus added.

The government is critical of companies that amass more customer data than necessary to make money from it in ways unrelated to the services for which the information was provided.

The penalties for serious breaches of the Privacy Act would increase from 2.2 million Australian dollars (\$1.4 million) now to AU\$50 million (\$32 million) under the proposed amendments.

A company could also be fined the value of 30% of its revenues over a defined period if that amount exceeded AU\$50 million (\$32 million).

Medibank said on Wednesday it did not have cyber insurance and estimated the hack would reduce its earnings by between AU\$25 million (\$16 million) and AU\$35 million (\$22 million) by early next year.

The Medicare trading halt was lifted on Wednesday and shares slid more than 14% in early trading.

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HEADLINE	10/25 Germany: cyber threats 'higher than ever'
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/german-cyber-agency-warns-threat-situation-is-higher-than-ever/
GIST	<p>Germany's federal cybersecurity office warned on Tuesday that ransomware, political hacking, and other cybersecurity threats facing the country are "higher than ever."</p> <p>In its annual report, the office said ongoing criminal activities were responsible for the threat level, alongside attacks linked to the Russian invasion of Ukraine — but it also warned that insufficient IT and software product quality was a contributing factor.</p> <p>While "a comprehensive attack campaign against German targets was not apparent," said the Federal Office for Information Security (BSI) there has been "an accumulation of minor incidents and hacktivism campaigns in Germany in connection with Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine."</p> <p>These included the cyberattack against the satellite company Viasat which took place an hour before Russia's invasion on 24 February. The United States, United Kingdom, and European Union attributed the attack to Russia — although they did not implicate a specific agency in the country — while EU and NATO member Estonia attributed it to the GRU, the Russian military's main intelligence directorate.</p> <p>The attack on Viasat was intended to degrade the ability of the Ukrainian government and military to communicate, however it also bricked routers for remote maintenance systems used by German wind turbines, knocking 5,800 of them offline. Viasat said tens of thousands of its terminals were irreparably damaged and needed to be replaced.</p>

“A hacktivism attack on German mineral oil dealers with a Russian parent company” was also mentioned by the BSI, presumably referencing anonymous hackers in March [stealing information](#) from the German subsidiary of the state-owned Russian oil company Rosneft.

The annual report is published amid a [scandal at the BSI](#) which followed a satirical television show making allegations about the agency’s now suspended chief, Arne Schönbohm, claiming he associated with a business connected to the Russian intelligence services.

Although no evidence has been presented that the office’s work has been compromised in any way, nor that Schönbohm has acted improperly, Germany’s Interior Ministry claimed the allegations “have permanently damaged the public’s necessary trust in the neutrality and impartiality of the conduct of his office as President of the most important German cyber security authority” in explaining his suspension.

Ransomware and cyber extortion incidents remain the most significant threat to Germany, the BSI said. “Both the ransom and hush money payments” have continued to rise, with a spate of incidents ahead of the Russian invasion affecting the oil and chemical sector in the country — as well as in its neighbors — provoking concerns that they were part of a criminal campaign coordinated by Russian intelligence. A [Belgian official downplayed to The Record](#) concerns that the attacks were linked.

A ransomware attack on the municipality of Anhalt-Bitterfeld also forced the regional authority to declare a state of disaster and call the German armed forces to be deployed for support. “Citizen-related services were unavailable or only partially available for more than 207 days,” reported the BSI.

Dr. Gerhard Schabhüser, the BSI’s vice president, currently filling Schönbohm’s duties, said: “The threat situation in cyberspace is tense, dynamic and diverse and therefore higher than ever. In a digitized world, the well-being of the population depends more than ever on how well we are prepared against IT security incidents.”

Nancy Faeser, the minister of the interior, who has pledged to expand the BSI into a central office, added: “The cyber threat situation, which has continued to increase since the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine, requires a strategic realignment and significant investments in our cyber security.”

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HEADLINE	10/25 Sudan internet faces disruptions
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/internet-is-shut-down-in-sudan-on-anniversary-of-military-coup/
GIST	<p>Online access in Sudan was disrupted Tuesday as tens of thousands protested on the anniversary of a military coup that derailed a transition towards democratic governance.</p> <p>Multiple global web traffic monitors reported an internet shutdown that significantly disrupted cell and fixed line connections lasting from roughly 9:50am to 6:15pm local time.</p> <p>Protesters clashed with police and at least one person was killed Tuesday, Reuters reported. The protests were the latest in a bloody series of demonstrations since the coup that brought current military leader Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan to power last October.</p> <p>“Today’s shutdown is the latest chapter in a sad legacy of internet shutdowns in Sudan,” Doug Madory, director of internet analysis at Kentik, told The Record.</p> <p>Authorities in Sudan have regularly turned to cutting or limiting online access during periods of civil unrest since before the 2019 overthrow of former dictator Omar al-Bashir, whose tenure saw nation-wide blackouts as well as a 68-day long block on social media sites from December 2018 through February of 2019.</p> <p>The military coup last year was also accompanied by a weeks-long internet shutdown that continued despite a local court order calling for access to be restored.</p>

	<p>The military regime has repeatedly disrupted online access when facing popular unrest ever since, including in December, January, June, and today.</p> <p>On Sunday, the government also suspended the Sudanese Society for Consumer Protection, a nonprofit that challenged the internet shutdowns last year in court. Authorities shut down the organization by force, seizing assets and withdrawing accreditation, Agence France-Presse reported.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/25 Australia to tighten online privacy laws
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/australia-to-tighten-privacy-laws-increase-fines-after-series-of-data-breaches/
GIST	<p>Australia plans to strengthen its online privacy laws following several major data breaches, attorney-general Mark Dreyfus said in a statement on Saturday.</p> <p>An amendment to the country's privacy law, which will be tabled in the Australian parliament this week, will increase fines for repeated or serious privacy breaches from the current \$2.2 AUD (about \$1.4 million) to up to AUD\$50 million (about \$32 million).</p> <p>The penalty can also amount to 30% of the company's revenue for the relevant period if that amount exceeded \$32 million.</p> <p>The announcement comes after several major Australian companies reported data breaches. Earlier this month, the Australian health insurer Medibank was hit by a cyberattack. Hackers compromised the credentials of a Medibank employee, gaining access to at least 1,000 policy records containing patients' personal and health claims data.</p> <p>In September, a cyberattack on the country's second-largest telecommunications company, Optus, compromised the personal information of almost 10 million Australians, or about 40% of the population.</p> <p>After the Optus hack, Australia's Cyber Security Minister Clare O'Neil said that Australia is "probably a decade behind" in privacy protections, and the government "has to be involved when the stakes are this high."</p> <p>New data privacy law</p> <p>New Australian online privacy legislation gives the country's data regulator more power to step in when critical services, such as banking or health care providers, suffer cyberattacks. The bill also requires companies to notify banks of customers who were potentially affected by a data breach to minimize fraud.</p> <p>Australia's proposed fines are higher than Europe's penalty of EUR\$20 million (about \$20 million) or 4% of annual global turnover under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).</p> <p>Previous Australian online privacy legislation was more forgiving. In addition to lower fines, it has allowed companies to voluntarily remedy the damages caused by the data breach — by apologizing or making payments to those affected by the cyberattack.</p> <p>The stricter rules, according to Dreyfus, will "incentivize better behavior."</p> <p>"When Australians are asked to hand over their personal data they have a right to expect it will be protected," he said.</p> <p>According to Dreyfus, the amount should be three times the value of any benefit obtained through the misuse of information. In practice, however, it may be difficult to prove a direct causal link between data misuse and companies' profits, said Dr. Lukasz Olejnik, an independent privacy researcher and consultant.</p>

The strict rules can prevent companies from building their business on the massive abuse and misuse of users' data, according to Olejnik.

But without clear guidance on how the Australian government plans to enforce the new rules and apply the penalties, it's hard to say what effect the new privacy law will have, he told The Record.

Old problems

This is not the first time Australia is trying to change its privacy laws and strengthen cybersecurity defense. In 2020, the Australian government [pledged](#) to spend AUD\$1.66 billion (about \$1.06 billion) over the next 10 years on cybersecurity for the private sector.

At that time, Australia's former Prime Minister Scott Morrison [said](#) that cyberattacks on local businesses and households cost about AUD\$29 billion (approximately \$18.57 billion), or 1.5% of Australia's gross domestic product (GDP).

Last year, Australia [drafted](#) an amendment to its privacy legislation with a fine of AUD\$10 million (about \$6.4 million) or 10% of the company's turnover.

It seems that these efforts were not enough. From July to December 2021, the Australian data privacy regulator [received](#) 464 data breach notifications. Among the most targeted industries were health care, finance, and legal services.

But a handful of recent headline-grabbing attacks have perhaps had the most impact. The Australian government was outraged by the Optus hack and O'Neil said that the country "should not have a telecommunications provider which has effectively left the window open for data of this nature to be stolen."

On Tuesday, Optus published a statement defending its handling of the data breach. "We are committed to learning, doing better in the future, and sharing lessons so all companies and all Australians can benefit from our terrible experience," the company [said](#).

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HEADLINE	10/25 Raccoon Infostealer key figure indicted
SOURCE	https://www.cyberscoop.com/raccoon-infostealer-doj-charges-ukraine/
GIST	<p>The Justice Department on Tuesday unsealed charges against a Ukrainian national for his role in the Raccoon Infostealer malware-as-a-service operation, which U.S. law enforcement officials blamed for infecting millions of computers around the world to steal personal data.</p> <p>Raccoon Infostealer sold its malware on the for \$75 per week or \$200 per month, but reportedly claimed it shut down in March after one of its developers died in the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Bleeping Computer reported at the time.</p> <p>Tuesday's DOJ announcement said Mark Sokolovsky, believed to be one of the key figures behind Raccoon Infostealer, was arrested by Dutch authorities in March. At the same time, the FBI and law enforcement partners in Italy and the Netherlands "dismantled the digital infrastructure supporting the Raccoon Infostealer, taking its then existing version offline."</p> <p>By June, however, a new version of Raccoon Stealer was up and running, according to Bleeping Computer. Sokolovsky — also known as "Photix," "raccoonstealer," and "black21jack77777" — faces charges of conspiracy to commit fraud and related activity in connection with computers, conspiracy to commit wire fraud, conspiracy to commit money laundering and aggravated identity theft, according to the indictment which was originally filed Nov. 2, 2021.</p> <p>A court in Amsterdam approved his extradition to the U.S. He's facing a maximum of more than 25 years in prison if convicted, the DOJ said.</p>

The operation “infected computers in many countries” between 2018 through early 2022, the DOJ said, calling Sokolovsky “one of the key administrators.” The FBI had identified more than 50 million unique credentials and forms of identification — emails, bank accounts, cryptocurrency addresses, credit card numbers — “from what appears to be millions of potential victims around the world,” the DOJ said.

“The United States does not believe it is in possession of all the data stolen by Raccoon Infostealer and continues to investigate,” the statement said.

The government [launched a page](#) on the FBI’s Internet Crime Complaint Center site for people to search whether their email address had been stolen. The FBI will send an email to that address if it appears in the dataset.

The page was intermittently unavailable shortly after the DOJ announcement.

According to the grand jury indictment, Sokolovsky received a copy of the data stolen by people who leased access to the malware and “stored millions of stolen log-in credentials and financial information records in an online drive.”

“This case highlights the importance of the international cooperation that the Department of Justice and our partners use to dismantle modern cyber threats,” Deputy Attorney General Lisa O. Monaco said in a statement. “As reflected in the number of potential victims and global breadth of this attack, cyber threats do not respect borders, which makes international cooperation all the more critical. I urge anyone who thinks they could be a victim to follow the FBI’s guidance on how to report your potential exposure.”

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HEADLINE	10/26 Cryptojacking ‘Kiss-a-Dog’ campaign
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/cloud-security/researchers-uncover-cryptojacking-campaign-targeting-docker-kubernetes-cloud-servers
GIST	<p>Researchers at CrowdStrike have discovered a new hacking campaign that targets cloud infrastructure around the world in service of a cryptojacking scheme.</p> <p>The campaign – dubbed "Kiss-A-Dog" – dates back to at least September, when a CrowdStrike honeypot first began picking up signs of attacks targeting vulnerable Docker and Kubernetes instances. The name given to the campaign derives from the domain name used by attackers to fetch the Python-coded malware payload: kiss[.]a-dog[.]top.</p> <p>It leverages multiple command and control servers to escape containerized environments and gain root privileges, while using kernel and user rootkits for obfuscation, creating backdoors, lateral movement and persistence. The attackers also demonstrated the ability to detect and uninstall third-party cloud monitoring services.</p> <p>Once they gained a foothold within a compromised container, the threat actors sought to compile network scanning tools to look for additional cloud servers running Docker and Kubernetes.</p> <p>And there are plenty to find. According to Shodan, there are more than 68,000 vulnerable Kubernetes instances (16,915 in the U.S.) and 13,000 Docker instances (2,320 in the U.S.) exposed to the internet globally.</p> <p>According to researchers, the ultimate goal was to harness victims’ computing power to install XMRig and mine cryptocurrency. While these attacks have been happening for some time before they were first observed by CrowdStrike, a parallel crash of the cryptocurrency market over the summer likely “muffled” their visibility and impact at first.</p>

	<p>“The campaigns by cryptojacking groups last from days to months depending on the success rate,” wrote Manoj Ahuje, senior threat researcher for cloud security. “As cryptocurrency prices have dropped, these campaigns have been muffled in the past couple of months until multiple campaigns were launched in October to take advantage of a low competitive environment.”</p> <p>CrowdStrike doesn’t make a firm attribution around the campaign, but does note that multiple attacks emanated from command and control servers that were previously used by TeamTNT, a hacking group known to target cloud and container environments.</p> <p>Research from Trend Micro released Oct. 19 tracks a very similar-sounding cryptomining campaign from actors that also target cloud containers, use TeamTNT routines and install XMRig on victim servers.</p> <p>However, Trend Micro senior threat researcher Sunil Bharti wrote that “analysis of the attack patterns and other technical details of the code has also led us to believe that the routines are mimicking TeamTNT’s arsenal, but are likely deployed by another cryptocurrency mining group named WatchDog.”</p>
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HEADLINE	10/25 Data breaches rise 70% in 2022
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/data-breaches-rise-by-70-q3-2022/
GIST	<p>A total of 108.9 million accounts were breached in the third quarter of 2022, a 70% increase compared to the previous quarter.</p> <p>The top five countries and regions most affected by data breaches in Q3 2022 were Russia, France, Indonesia, the US and Spain. While Russia had the most breaches overall (22.3 million), France had the highest breach density, averaging 212 leaked accounts per 1000 people.</p> <p>The figures come from a new study by cybersecurity company Surfshark, which said the staggering increase in breached users worldwide comes after a comparatively timid growth in the year's first half.</p> <p>"It's concerning to see data breaches rising again after a comparatively timid first half of the year, putting a massive 108.9M internet users at risk," said Agneska Sablovskaja, lead researcher at Surfshark.</p> <p>"Global user breaches are 70% higher this quarter than the last. Every second in the past three months, 14 accounts were leaked – all of them coming from different countries."</p> <p>While Russia led in terms of data breaches in each quarter of 2022 so far, throughout the last 10 years, the United States remained the single most breached country.</p> <p>The situation only shifted at the start of 2022 when the number of breached Russian accounts rose by 136% MoM (Month on Month) since the end of February, aligning with Ukraine's invasion.</p> <p>Belarus appeared in 19th position with 539,000 reported breaches and a 4x growth from the previous quarter. Meanwhile, Ukraine experienced a 14% drop in breached users quarter-over-quarter, which took them to the 17th position globally.</p> <p>From a regulatory standpoint, the new data suggests that in Indonesia, breached user count has grown by a striking 1370% in the last quarter, which alongside previous incidents, has pushed the parliament to ratify the Personal Data Protection Act.</p> <p>For more data about the most impactful data breaches in Q3 2022, the Surfshark report is available at this link.</p> <p>Its publication comes weeks after several data breaches were revealed in Australia, the largest of which affected nearly 2.1 million Australians.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/26 Ransomware threat shifts globally
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/ransomware-threat-shifts-from-us/
GIST	<p>The volume of ransomware detections in Q3 2022 was the lowest in two years, but certain geographical regions have become bigger targets as attacks on US organizations wane, according to SonicWall.</p> <p>The security vendor used its own threat detection network, including over one million security sensors in more than 200 countries, to reveal the current landscape.</p> <p>The good news is that global malware volumes have remained flat for the past three quarters, amounting to a total of over four billion detections in the year to date.</p> <p>Of these, ransomware is also trending down after a record-breaking 2021. Even so, SonicWall detected 338 million compromise attempts in the first three quarters of the year. Year-to-date ransomware attempts in 2022 have already exceeded the full-year totals from four of the past five years, the vendor claimed.</p> <p>While attacks on US organizations dipped by 51% year-on-year during the period, they increased significantly in the UK (20%), EMEA (38%) and APAC (56%).</p> <p>SonicWall President and CEO Bob VanKirk argued that this is taking its toll on security professionals.</p> <p>“The cyber-warfare battlefield continues to shift, posing dangerous threats to organizations of all sizes,” he added.</p> <p>“With expanding attack surfaces, growing numbers of threats and the current geopolitical landscape, it should be no surprise that even the most seasoned IT professional can feel overwhelmed.”</p> <p>Elsewhere, cryptojacking detections surged 35% year-on-year in the first three quarters of 2022, including a 377% spike in EMEA and a 160% increase in APAC.</p> <p>IoT malware detections increased 92% globally over the same period, including 82% in APAC and 200% in North America, SonicWall said.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/25 Credit card payment terminals targeted
SOURCE	https://www.hackread.com/stolen-credit-card-numbers-pos-malware/
GIST	<p>Cybercriminals are increasingly targeting credit card payment terminals to steal sensitive information, reveals new research from Group-IB Botnet Monitoring Team.</p> <p>The team’s head Nikolay Shelekhov and the company’s analyst, Said Khamchiev, shared details of how cybercriminals used a PoS (point-of-sale) malware to steal over 167,000 payment records from 212 compromised devices. Almost all of the affected users were based in the USA.</p> <p>The campaign was discovered in April 2022, but researchers believe the campaign occurred between February 2021 and September 8, 2022.</p> <p>Researchers blamed a poorly configured C2 server for PoS malware MajikPOS. The configuration allowed them to assess the server. They discovered that the server hosted a separate C2 administrative panel for a unique POS malware variant identified as Treasure Hunter (first detected in 2014). This malware also collects compromised card data.</p> <p>For your information, MajikPOS and Treasure Hunter malware infect Windows POS terminals. For infecting a store, MajikPOS (first detected in 2017) scans the network for open or poorly secured RDP and VNC remote-desktop services. It then brute forces into the network or purchases access to the systems’ credentials.</p>

Both malware can scan the devices and look to exploit the card when the device is reading card data. The malware then stores the information in plain text in memory. Moreover, Treasure Hunter can perform RAM scraping, which pores over the memory of all running processes on the register to locate freshly swiped magnetic stripe data from a shopper's bank card. Conversely, MajikPOS can scan infected PCs for card details. The information is then sent over to the attacker's C2 server.

During their month-long investigation, Group-IB assessed around 77,400 card dumps from MajikPOS and 90,000 from Treasure Hunter panels. Around 75,455 or 97% of MajikPOS compromised cards were issued by US banks, and the rest were from banks worldwide. Regarding Treasure Hunter, 96% or 86,411 cards were issued in the USA. They also detected eleven victim firms in the USA.

Further probe revealed that cybercriminals used two POS malware strains to steal details of over 167,000 credit cards. All the data was stolen from payment terminals. Researchers noted that the backend C2 server operating the Treasure Hunter and MAJikPOS malware strains was still active, and the number of victims increased continuously.

After discovering the attack, Group-IB notified law enforcement agencies, and a US-based threat-sharing agency was also notified. In their [blog post](#), Group-IB also revealed that:

“The information about compromised cards, POS terminals, and the victims that Group-IB researchers were able to identify, was shared upon discovery with a US-based non-profit alliance that brings together private industry, academia, and law enforcement.”

Group-IB

It is unclear who stole the data of such a vast number of credit cards and whether the data was sold or used. However, researchers are confident that the stolen data could fetch over \$3.3 million if [sold on underground marketplaces](#).

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HEADLINE	10/25 'See Tickets' 2021 credit card theft breach
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/see-tickets-discloses-25-years-long-credit-card-theft-breach/
GIST	<p>Ticketing service provider 'See Tickets' has disclosed a data breach, informing customers that cybercriminals might have accessed their payment card details via a skimmer on its website.</p> <p>Skimmers are snippets of JavaScript code injected on order checkout pages to steal inputted payment card details from customers, in this case, people who bought a ticket to a live entertainment event.</p> <p>According to a data breach notification shared with the Montana Attorney General's office, See Tickets discovered the breach in April 2021, when they started an investigation with the help of a forensics firm.</p> <p>However, it wasn't until January 8, 2022, that the malicious code was fully removed from its site.</p> <p>After engaging with forensic experts and Visa, MasterCard, American Express, and Discover to investigate the incident further, See Tickets concluded on September 12, 2022, that unauthorized parties may have accessed customer credit card information.</p> <p>The internal investigation showed that the infection happened on June 25, 2019, so the total duration of the exposure was just over 2.5 years.</p> <p>The customer information that the hackers might have stolen includes the following data:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Full names▪ Physical address▪ ZIP code

- Payment card number
- Card expiration date
- CVV number

See Tickets says Social Security Numbers, state identification numbers, or bank account information have not been exposed due to this incident, as they're not stored in its systems.

Due to the type of data the hackers stole, See Tickets warns that users should be vigilant against unauthorized credit card transactions and identity theft.

Threat actors commonly use stolen credit card information to purchase goods from online stores and then sell them to private individuals for money laundering.

The proceedings of these sales are often bounced through "money mule" networks before they reach the crooks to obscure their trace.

Additionally, the notice urges the impacted recipients to remain vigilant against phishing emails or other unsolicited communication and monitor credit card statements for suspicious charges.

Unfortunately, See Tickets has not offered a free-of-charge identity protection service for the impacted individuals, so exposed customers were left on their own to deal with the consequences of the security breach.

The number of the impacted customers is unknown, and See Tickets hasn't clarified if skimmers infected only the global site or any of the other five domains it operates for regional audiences in the U.S., Canada, and Europe.

BleepingComputer has contacted See Tickets on the matter, but we are still waiting to receive a response.

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HEADLINE	10/25 Large-scale 'freejacking' campaign
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/massive-cryptomining-campaign-abuses-free-tier-cloud-dev-resources/
GIST	<p>An automated and large-scale 'freejacking' campaign abuses free GitHub, Heroku, and Buddy services to mine cryptocurrency at the provider's expense.</p> <p>The operation relies on abusing the limited resources offered to free-tier cloud accounts to generate a tiny profit from each free account, which, when combined, becomes something more significant.</p> <p>The threat actor behind the campaign, called 'Purpleurchin,' was observed performing over a million function calls daily, using CI/CD service providers such as GitHub (300 accounts), Heroku (2,000 accounts), and Buddy.works (900 accounts).</p> <p>The use of those accounts is rotated and channeled through 130 Docker Hub images with mining containers, while obfuscation on all operational levels has kept Purpleurchin undetected until now.</p> <p>Operation details</p> <p>In a new report by Sysdig, researchers explain that the core of the operation is a linuxapp container ('linuxapp84744474447444744474') that acts as the command and control server (C2) and Stratum server, coordinating all active mining agents and directing them to the threat actor's mining pool.</p> <p>A shell script ('userlinux8888') is used to automate the creation of GitHub accounts, create a repository, and replicate the workflow using GitHub actions. All GitHub actions are obfuscated using random strings for the names.</p>

Purpleurchin uses OpenVPN and Namecheap VPN to register each account with a different IP address to evade GitHub's bot activity detection.

The GitHub actions launch over 30 instances of Docker images on each run, using pre-set arguments for the script to be executed, proxy IP and port to connect to, Stratum ID name, and max memory and CPU amounts to use.

Eventually, another script ("linuxwebapp88") will validate the configuration on the Stratum server, receive the Docker command contained in the GitHub repository, and start the miner container.

The miner uses a tiny part of the server's CPU power to stealthily mine a range of crypto coins such as Tidecoin, Onyx, Surgarchain, Sprint, Yenten, Arionum, MintMe, and Bitweb.

The mining process employs a custom Stratum mining protocol relay that hampers network scanners' ability to discover the outbound connections to mining pools.

This relay also obscures the threat actor's crypto wallet address, so Purpleurchin's profit remains an unanswered question for Sysdig's analysts.

Profit and damage

The cryptocurrency chosen by the threat actors to mine are marginally profitable, so Sysdig presumes the operation is either in an early experimental phase or attempting to take control of blockchains by creating a network control majority of 51%.

If the first scenario is true, the threat actor could soon switch to more profitable coins like Monero or Bitcoin.

In either case, the goal of Purpleurchin cannot be anything other than financial profit, but the ongoing freejacking operation might not be the direct channel to achieve that yet.

The damage for GitHub, however, is still significant and measurable, with Sysdig's analysts estimating it to be \$15 per month per account. For Heroku and Buddy, the cost is between \$7 and \$10 per month per account.

Based on these calculations, it would cost the service provider over \$100,000 for the threat actor to mine one Monero (XMR) via freejacking.

That's about ten times higher than the damage caused by normal cryptojacking operations, estimated to be roughly [\\$11,000 per Monero](#).

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HEADLINE	10/25 Vice Society targets schools
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/microsoft-vice-society-targets-schools-with-multiple-ransomware-families/
GIST	<p>A threat group known as Vice Society has been switching ransomware payloads in attacks targeting the education sector across the United States and worldwide.</p> <p>While this isn't necessarily new information, since the group is known for using multiple ransomware strains in some attacks, Microsoft has also seen them use this tactic against organizations in the U.S. education sector between July and October 2022.</p> <p>As Microsoft Security Threat Intelligence analysts shared in a report published today, Vice Society (tracked by Redmond as DEV-0832) has been swapping between BlackCat, QuantumLocker, Zeppelin, and a Vice Society-branded variant of Zeppelin ransomware.</p>

Since September, they've shifted to a modified version of their payload dubbed [RedAlert](#) that adds the .locked file extension to encrypted documents, according to Microsoft's analysts.

While Vice Society runs its own data leak site, it should be noted that the RedAlert and BlackCat operations have their own leak sites as well.

Besides the strains mentioned in the report, BleepingComputer is aware that the gang has also been deploying HelloKitty/Five Hands ransomware as part of their attacks.

Vice Society will also skip the ransomware deployment stage in some attacks, with the operators opting for stealing sensitive data from their victims' networks and extorting them under the threat of leaking the stolen files online.

"In several cases, Microsoft assesses that the group did not deploy ransomware and instead possibly performed extortion using only exfiltrated stolen data," the company [said](#).

"The shift from a ransomware as a service (RaaS) offering (BlackCat) to a purchased wholly-owned malware offering (Zeppelin) and a custom Vice Society variant indicates DEV-0832 has active ties in the cybercriminal economy and has been testing ransomware payload efficacy or post-ransomware extortion opportunities."

Targets set on U.S. schools

[Vice Society](#) is a threat group active since at least early June 2021, known for deploying multiple ransomware strains on their victims' networks, such as [Hello Kitty/Five Hands](#) and [Zeppelin ransomware](#).

They also exfiltrate data from compromised systems before encryption and use it for double extortion, threatening victims to leak it online if their ransom demands aren't met.

One of the group's most recent victims is [Los Angeles Unified \(LAUSD\)](#), the second-largest school district in the United States.

Another high-profile education sector victim is the [Austrian Medical University of Innsbruck](#) which had to reset all 3,400 students' and 2,200 employees' account passwords following severe IT service disruption.

In November, a group of U.S. Senators urged the Departments of Education and Homeland Security to [strengthen cybersecurity protections at K-12 schools](#) so that they can keep up with this ongoing wave of ransomware attacks.

Last month, the FBI and CISA also warned in a joint advisory that the [Vice Society group disproportionately targets](#) the U.S. education sector.

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HEADLINE	10/25 Threat groups repurpose banking Trojans
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/risk/threat-groups-repurpose-banking-trojans-backdoors
GIST	<p>Threat groups continue to recycle code from older tools into more generalized frameworks, a trend that will continue as the codebases incorporate more modularity, security experts said this week.</p> <p>In the latest example, the threat group behind Ursnif — aka Gozi — recently moved the tool away from a focus on financial services to more general backdoor capabilities, cybersecurity services firm Mandiant stated in an analysis. The new variant, which the company has dubbed LDR4, is likely intended to facilitate the spread of ransomware and the theft of data for extortion.</p> <p>The modular malware joins Trickbot, Emotet, Qakbot, IcedID, and Gootkit, among others, as tools that started as banking Trojans but have been repurposed as backdoors, without requiring the development effort of</p>

creating an entirely new codebase, says Jeremy Kennelly, senior manager for financial crime analysis at Mandiant.

"The developers working on banking Trojans have taken multiple approaches to retooling their malware as a backdoor to support intrusion operations, though a major code rewrite hasn't generally been deemed necessary," he says. "These malware families — at their core — are just modular backdoors that have historically loaded secondary components enabling 'banker' functionality."

Mandiant's analysis of Ursnif points out that maintaining multiple codebases is a challenging task for malware developers, especially when one mistake could give defenders a way to block an attack and investigators a way to hunt down the attacker. Maintaining a single modular codebase is much more scalable, [the company's analysis this week stated](#).

A Malware Movement Toward Backdoor Modularity

It's unsurprising that malware developers are moving to more general and modular code, says Max Gannon, a senior intelligence analyst at Cofense.

"In some cases, a purpose-built remote access Trojan (RAT), traditionally viewed as a backdoor, may be more conducive to the threat activity," he says. "However, a lot of threat actors want more than just a backdoor, and many commodity malware families have morphed to become multipurpose tools that simply include backdoor access."

The specialization of tools in the cybercriminal underground is also a reason why older codebases are being repurposed. By focusing specific tools on areas of attack — such as initial access, lateral movement, or data exfiltration — the developers of these tools are able to differentiate themselves against competitors and offer a unique set of features. Using existing codebases also saves time, and making such projects modular allows the tool to be customized for the customer's — read, "attacker's" — needs, says Jon Clay, vice president of threat intelligence at Trend Micro.

"The coders behind many of these toolkits create them and sell them within the cybercriminal underground markets, as they offer newbies and other malicious actors with a ready-made kits for executing attacks," he says. "Many of these offer automations now as well as GUI interfaces to manage the attacks and victim information/data."

The original Ursnif code appeared in the mid-2000s. The Zeus banking Trojan — [used in thefts of tens of millions](#), and likely hundreds of millions, of dollars — has [had a similar trajectory](#), with its adoption accelerated by a source code leak. Another banking Trojan, [Emotet](#), has now become a general backdoor, allowing its development group to offer access as a service to other cybercriminals, a business relationship also demonstrated by [Qakbot, another Trojan initially created as a banking Trojan](#).

All of these programs had the benefit of modularity, says Mandiant's Kennelly.

"All bankers that have been broadly repurposed as backdoors were already modular, which has the added benefit of limiting the complexity of the core malware while providing significant operational flexibility," he says. "These established malware families also had a proven track record and general familiarity to the actors using them."

Swiss Army Knife Malware Delivery

Rather than changes in functionality, a lot of the evolution in categorizing attackers tools has come about because labeling has had to catch up to changes in the malware design. By redesigning the codebases to be modular, defining a tool as a single thing — whether a banking Trojan, a spam bot, or a worm — becomes much more difficult. Adding a single new module would change the label for the code.

In the past, for example, computer viruses spread by infecting files, while worms used automated scanning and exploitation to spread quickly and more widely. However, a number of Trojans incorporated either or both functionality, leading to a more general term: malicious software, or malware.

	<p>A similar evolution has happened around the classification of attacker tools. Programs that were originally considered to be banking Trojans, RATs, or a scanning tools are now capabilities of more general frameworks, says Codefense's Gannon.</p> <p>"If we think of a backdoor as software that sits on a machine to provide access that skirts normal security measures, banking Trojans inherently act as backdoors in order to perform their usual functions, so almost any banking Trojan can be used as one without the need for many changes," he says. "The difference is often simply in the intent of the user."</p>
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HEADLINE	10/25 LinkedIn phishing spoof bypasses security
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/risk/linkedin-phishing-spoof-bypasses-google-workspace-security
GIST	<p>A phishing email purportedly from LinkedIn with the subject line "We noticed some unusual activity" was discovered targeting users at a travel organization, in an attempt to pilfer their credentials on the social-media platform.</p> <p>The phishing campaign slipped past Google's email security controls after cheating email authentication checks via SFP and DMARC, according to Armorblox, whose email security system at the victim organization found and stopped the attack pointed at some 500 user inboxes.</p> <p>"The main call-to-action button (<i>Secure my account</i>) included within the email contains a bad URL and took victims to a fake landing page. This fake landing page ... mimicked a legitimate LinkedIn sign in page that included LinkedIn logos, language, and illustrations that mirrored true LinkedIn branding," Armorblox wrote in a post about the attack campaign.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/25 Windows Mark of the Web zero-days
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/attacks-breaches/windows-mark-of-the-web-zero-days-patchless-exploit
GIST	<p>Two separate vulnerabilities exist in different versions of Windows that allow attackers to sneak malicious attachments and files past Microsoft's Mark of the Web (MOTW) security feature.</p> <p>Attackers are actively exploiting both issues, according to Will Dormann, a former software vulnerability analyst with CERT Coordination Center (CERT/CC) at Carnegie Mellon University, who discovered the two bugs. But so far, Microsoft has not issued any fixes for them, and no known workarounds are available for organizations to protect themselves, says the researcher, who has been credited with discovering numerous zero-day vulnerabilities over his career.</p> <p>MotW Protections for Untrusted Files</p> <p>MotW is a Windows feature designed to protect users against files from untrusted sources. The mark itself is a hidden tag that Windows attaches to files downloaded from the Internet. Files that carry the MotW tag are restricted in what they do and how they function. For example, starting with MS Office 10, MotW-tagged files open by default in Protected View, and executables are first vetted for security issues by Windows Defender before they are allowed to run.</p> <p>"Many Windows security features — [such as] Microsoft Office Protected view, SmartScreen, Smart App Control, [and] warning dialogs — rely on the presence of the MotW to function," Dormann, who is presently a senior vulnerability analyst at Analygen, tells Dark Reading.</p> <p>Bug 1: MotW .ZIP Bypass, with Unofficial Patch</p> <p>Dormann reported the first of the two MotW bypass issues to Microsoft on July 7. According to him, Windows fails to apply the MotW to files extracted from specifically crafted .ZIP files.</p> <p>"Any file contained within a .ZIP can be configured in a way so that when it's extracted, it will not contain MOTW markings," Dorman says. "This allows an attacker to have a file that will operate in a way that</p>

makes it appear that it did not come from the Internet." This makes it easier for them to trick users into running arbitrary code on their systems, Dormann notes.

Dormann says he cannot share details of the bug, because that would give away how attackers could leverage the flaw. But he says it affects all versions of Windows from XP on. He says one reason he has not heard from Microsoft likely is because the vulnerability was reported to them via CERT's Vulnerability Information and Coordination Environment (VINCE), a platform that he says Microsoft has refused to use.

"I haven't worked at CERT since late July, so I cannot say if Microsoft has attempted to contact CERT in any way from July on," he cautions.

Dormann says other security researchers have reported seeing attackers actively exploiting the flaw. One of them is security researcher Kevin Beaumont, a former threat intelligence analyst at Microsoft. In a tweet thread earlier this month, Beaumont reported the flaw as being exploited in the wild.

"This is without a doubt the [dumbest zero day I've worked on](#)," Beaumont said.

In a separate tweet a day later, Beaumont said he wanted to release detection guidance for the issue but was concerned about the potential fallout.

"If Emotet/Qakbot/etc find it they will 100% use it at scale," he warned.

Microsoft did not respond to two Dark Reading requests seeking comment on Dormann's reported vulnerabilities or whether it had any plans to address them, but Slovenia-based security firm Acros Security last week [released an unofficial patch](#) for this first vulnerability via its 0patch patching platform.

In comments to Dark Reading, Mitja Kolsek, CEO and co-founder of 0patch and Acros Security, says he was able to confirm the vulnerability that Dormann reported to Microsoft in July.

"Yes, it is ridiculously obvious once you know it. That's why we didn't want to reveal any details," he says. He says the code performing the unzipping of .ZIP files is flawed and only a code patch can fix that. "There are no workarounds," Kolsek says.

Kolsek says the issue is not difficult to exploit, but he adds the vulnerability alone is not enough for a successful attack. To exploit successfully, an attacker would still need to convince a user into opening a file in a maliciously crafted .ZIP archive — sent as an attachment via a phishing email or copied from a removable drive such as a USB stick for instance.

"Normally, all files extracted from a .ZIP archive that is marked with MotW would also get this mark and would therefore trigger a security warning when opened or launched," he says, but the vulnerability definitely allows attackers a way to bypass the protection. "We are not aware of any mitigating circumstances," he adds.

Bug 2: Sneaking Past MotW With Corrupt Authenticode Signatures

The second vulnerability involves the handling of MotW tagged files that have corrupt Authenticode digital signatures. [Authenticode is a Microsoft code-signing technology](#) that authenticates the identity of the publisher of a particular piece of software and determines whether the software was tampered with after it was published.

Dormann says he discovered that if a file has a malformed Authenticode signature, it will be treated by Windows as if it had no MotW; the vulnerability causes Windows to skip SmartScreen and other warning dialogs before executing a JavaScript file.

"Windows appears to 'fail open' when it encounters an error [when] processing Authenticode data," Dormann says, and "it will no longer apply MotW protections to Authenticode-signed files, despite them actually still retaining the MotW."

Dormann describes the issue as affecting every version of Windows from version 10 on, including the server variant of Windows Server 2016. The vulnerability gives attackers a way to sign any file that can be signed by Authenticode in a corrupt manner — such as .exe files and JavaScript files — and sneak it past MOTW protections.

Dormann says he learned of the issue after reading an HP Threat Research blog from earlier this month about a [Magniber ransomware campaign](#) involving an exploit for the flaw.

It's unclear if Microsoft is taking action, but for now, researchers continue to raise the alarm. "I have not received an official response from Microsoft, but at the same time, I have not officially reported the issue to Microsoft, as I'm no longer a CERT employee," Dormann says. "I announced it publicly via Twitter, due to the vulnerability being used by attackers in the wild."

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HEADLINE	10/25 Broadband: high prices, low speed, fraud
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/10/25/broadband-subsidies-coronavirus-aid/
GIST	<p>The complaints began pouring into Washington this summer, the criticism directed at Assurance Wireless, a little-known company owned by the telecom giant T-Mobile.</p> <p>In Sun Valley, Calif., a local resident in June claimed that Assurance Wireless sent an agent to their mother's door — and pushed her to sign up for mobile internet funded by the federal government even though she didn't need it.</p> <p>Another in Phoenixville, Pa., alleged a month later that they received a "deceptive" offer in a text message — which ultimately resulted in federal aid being sent to Assurance Wireless for service that the customer said they didn't seek.</p> <p>And time and again, a social worker in South Boston claimed Assurance Wireless and other providers had enrolled seniors in the government program under dubious terms. Sounding off to the Federal Communications Commission, the nation's chief telecom regulator, the unnamed writer coupled their criticism with a plea for help: "This is not an isolated incident for me."</p> <p>At the height of the coronavirus pandemic, Congress chartered a first-of-its-kind federal effort to help struggling Americans who could not afford to lose access to the internet. The generous aid proved to be a godsend for millions of low-income families, but it also sent the nation's telecom giants scrambling for the new federal money — unleashing price hikes, service cuts and fraud risks that hurt customers and taxpayers alike.</p> <p>The story of the government's roughly \$17 billion efforts to close the country's persistent digital divide is one of great promise and costly peril. Under the program, Washington offered to pay stipends directly to internet providers that lowered Americans monthly broadband bills — potentially to zero. But this simple premise at times brought complicated, undesirable results.</p> <p>In the earliest days of the program, telecom giants including AT&T, Charter Communications and Verizon forced customers to accept price increases or slower connection speeds if they wanted to apply federally funded discounts to their bills, according to complaints filed with the FCC and later obtained by The Washington Post under federal open-records laws.</p> <p>The companies' practices — on top of the government's flawed application system — also left the program at risk of fraud, according to the FCC's internal watchdog. Last year, for example, a wide array of internet providers including Dish Network, the owner of Boost Mobile, administered aid for roughly 200,000 people who claimed to have children attending schools in high-poverty areas. But tens of</p>

thousands of these beneficiaries listed schools on their applications that were thousands of miles away from their home addresses, The Post found, while others never named a child at all. A subsequent crackdown ultimately saw the government cancel benefits for nearly all these school-based subscribers, including those with likely legitimate claims.

The Biden administration worked with Congress to improve the program [beginning in November 2021](#), but new trouble soon emerged: Assurance Wireless along with other, lesser-known internet providers started showing up at Americans' doors unannounced, pushing subpar service on unsuspecting families and potentially signing up others without their knowledge or permission. Others who received aid through another low-cost T-Mobile brand, Metro by T-Mobile, reported additional incidents — including months-long delays that left them on the hook for bills they could not afford.

Tara Darrow, a spokeswoman for T-Mobile and its other brands, Assurance Wireless and Metro, said they took “took extraordinary measures, closely following FCC guidelines and using recommended systems” to stand up benefits in record time. She said delays are uncommon, while there is “no instance where a customer could be enrolled in these programs without their permission.”

To date, [more than 14 million](#) households have enrolled in the federal broadband benefit system, the government reports. But the figure represents about a quarter of the [estimated 49 million American households](#) that are eligible for help, according to a Washington Post analysis. Telecom experts attribute at least some of the gap to the multibillion-dollar industry that administers the aid.

“What you’re seeing is not an issue with the [federal] program, it’s an issue with the broadband economy ecosystem overall,” said Brandon Forester, a national organizer at MediaJustice, an activist group that promotes online access particularly for marginalized groups.

“Their interest is not in serving community members,” Forester said of the internet providers. “Their legal requirement is to return profits to shareholders and investors.”

This story is based on interviews with nearly three dozen government officials, public-interest advocates, nonprofit leaders and internet subscribers, most of whom spoke on the condition of anonymity to reveal private deliberations. The Post also obtained data under the Freedom of Information Act about nearly 200,000 subscribers, along with thousands of consumer complaints, including those concerning Assurance Wireless and other firms.

In written responses, spokespeople for AT&T, Charter, Comcast, Dish and Verizon each called the broadband benefits essential in keeping Americans online. They said they had been diligent stewards of federal money and noted many of the discrepancies stemmed from the government’s own actions.

Paloma Perez, a spokeswoman for the FCC, said that “investigations” are underway — and that the commission is aggressively keeping watch over federal aid. On Capitol Hill, lawmakers pledged to press the telecom industry over its tactics as well.

“Congress put strong consumer protections into the laws to prevent these types of egregious actions from occurring in the first place, and these companies have a lot to answer for,” said Rep. Frank Pallone Jr. (D-N.J.), the leader of the telecom-focused House Energy and Commerce Committee. “I intend to hold them accountable.”

‘Bait and switch’

For Cristina Pastrana, the prospect of cheap broadband last year came as a welcome surprise. The 43-year-old in Brooklyn had just subscribed to Verizon fiber internet that August, and she soon looked to apply a government discount toward her roughly \$90 monthly bill.

Called the Emergency Broadband Benefit, the aid program offered Americans up to \$50 each month toward internet services if they received certain other government aid, including health benefits under Medicaid or food stamps, or if they were unemployed. Congress [approved the initiative](#) in December

2020, adding it to the roughly \$5 trillion in federal relief funds that helped rescue the economy even while it unleashed a wide array of waste, fraud and abuse, as The Post has found in its year-long investigation, the [Covid Money Trail](#).

But Pastrana quickly discovered the help came with a catch. In a recent interview, she said Verizon called her after she enrolled in the federal program with an ultimatum: She could keep the subsidy only if she agreed to switch to a different plan with lower speeds. Out of work and facing financial hardship, Pastrana fought to keep her service and prevailed, though she later described the situation as a “bait and switch.”

“People are working from home, they have their kids at home, they can’t afford this — and you’re literally threatening to remove the service or support,” she said.

Many customers — with Verizon and other carriers — complained to the FCC about similar threats and demands. Their frustrations reflected the [program’s signature challenge](#) in its early days, as telecom giants accepted government subsidies only on the condition that customers accepted price hikes or service cuts.

“There’s a lot of mistrust [that] there’s going to be a catch,” said Evan Marwell, the executive director of EducationSuperHighway, a nonprofit that has advocated for the program and helped people enroll.

In creating the federal broadband benefits, Congress faced an urgent task. Roughly one quarter of Americans do not subscribe to high-speed home internet, [according to the Pew Research Center](#), a digital divide made worse by a pandemic that forced people to work, learn and communicate online. Lawmakers could have put in place tough, strict rules, requiring telecom providers to maintain a minimum level of service in exchange for federal payments. But Democrats and Republicans faced an onslaught of industry lobbying, so they instead chose to apply a light touch in the waning days of the Trump administration — and made companies’ participation in the program voluntary.

Telecom giants soon subjected their customers to a patchwork of inconsistent speeds and price points. AT&T, for example, told some subscribers with premium service — ultrafast fiber connections with download speeds up to one gigabit per second — that they could receive the subsidy only if they changed to service that was one-third as fast with possible monthly data caps, according to complaints filed with the FCC.

“Internet service providers should not be allowed to ruin this program,” a frustrated AT&T subscriber from Orange, Calif., told the agency in June 2021. The comment, one of thousands obtained from the FCC under the Freedom of Information Act, redacted filers’ names and other details.

Some subscribers with Charter and its internet offering, Spectrum, were stunned to read the company’s fine print last year. To receive federally funded discounts, customers had to opt into higher-priced service once the government aid, totaling \$3.2 billion, ran out — threatening them with potential price spikes in the future.

More recently, Charter has paired federal broadband benefits with its own promotional discounts. The move has opened the door for sizable price increases on low-income Americans once the company’s time-limited assistance expires.

“I am trying to get help to lower my bill temporarily because of the hardship COVID has caused and why would I increase my price plan to get a discount and then end up paying the same or more,” a customer from Fairfield, Maine, told the FCC last May.

Asked about the complaints, AT&T spokesman Jim Greer said the rush in Washington “presented unique technical challenges,” so the company could only apply the benefit to select plans at first because of its computer systems. Cameron Blanchard, a spokeswoman for Charter, said the company had been clear with its customers — securing “significant participation” in the program while helping “millions of families gain access” to affordable internet.

Only after a public outcry did Verizon [reverse course last May](#). Rich Young, a spokesman, acknowledged in a statement that “some customers experienced administrative issues during the program’s initial rollout.” But he added that “most if not all of those problems have been rectified.”

An ‘entry point for fraud’

It did not seem particularly unusual when 75 families in and around Jamaica, Queens, each signed up for federally funded internet last fall. Like many cash-starved Americans, the residents of this New York City neighborhood were eager to lower their broadband bills — and they soon put their up-to \$50 government discounts toward service offered by Boost Mobile, the low-cost provider owned by Dish Network.

But the help proved short-lived. Not even three months after enrolling, nearly all of the families had been removed from the government program. Each had claimed on their application to have a child attending a high-poverty school, and each had said that school was roughly 4,000 miles away — in Anchorage and other parts of Alaska — raising the suspicions of federal watchdogs.

The details are laid bare in a trove of new data obtained by The Post under the Freedom of Information Act. The records illustrate how mishaps and missteps at the start of the broadband program — from aggressive telecom sales agents to faulty government technologies — may have put taxpayer dollars and innocent Americans at risk.

In setting up the benefits, the government sought to ease the burden on low-income families, particularly those with students studying at schools in high-poverty areas. To qualify, parents had to indicate the school they attended on the federal application.

Nearly 200,000 people ultimately obtained subsidies this way by the end of 2021, according to the data obtained by The Post. But a significant portion managed to enroll despite submitting incomplete or irregular applications, the records show.

More than 143,000 of those beneficiaries signed up for monthly stipends on behalf of a student whose name they never supplied, the records show. Nearly 20,000 applicants — some including children’s names, some not — also named a school 50 miles or more away from their home address, a distance that federal investigators would later identify as suspicious.

An AT&T subscriber in Clifton, N.J., for example, qualified for a federally funded discount by claiming last October they had a child who was receiving free or reduced-price lunch — at a school in Nampa, Idaho, more than 2,300 miles away. That same month, in Philadelphia, a customer of a smaller provider, Excess Telecom, obtained federal benefits on behalf of a student about 2,300 miles away in San Diego.

But the most frequent issues involved Dish and its low-cost brand, Boost Mobile, which received federal money on behalf of more than 11,000 applicants who claimed to have students attending far-flung schools. That included more than 400 students who were 1,000 miles away or more.

In many cases, employees at Boost Mobile stores — and agents at other internet providers — helped people obtain the discounts. Across the industry, company workers assisted at least 73,000 school-related subscribers in enrolling for federal benefits, the data show, meaning telecom giants may have played some role in overseeing the submission of problematic applications.

Ted Wietecha, a spokesman for Dish, said Boost Mobile services are offered through “independent third-party retail outlets.” He added that the company has “worked to be a reliable partner” with the FCC, and its efforts had resulted in “multiple process improvements” in the benefit program.

Jo Maney, a spokeswoman for Excess Wireless, said the company is “working diligently with government officials and other stakeholders to root out improper activities.” Greer, a spokesman for AT&T, said the problem stemmed from the federal government’s application system, since the wireless giant “relied” on that technology “to determine whether a household is eligible.”

The suspected fraud underscored a conundrum for the Biden administration as it sought to thwart criminals while helping low-income Americans access aid. Too many regulatory restrictions would have deterred families from signing up, while too few threatened to invite abuse.

The same dynamic long plagued a precursor program, known as Lifeline, which launched under President Ronald Reagan to reduce needy Americans' home phone bills. As that program expanded, the FCC increasingly issued fines, particularly in cases where agents signed up people who didn't qualify — and still collected commissions.

But some of the FCC's recent attempts under President Donald Trump to fight Lifeline fraud [instead left the program in disrepair](#). The Trump-era FCC, overseen at the time by Chairman Ajit Pai, never finished what was supposed to be a national online application for Lifeline benefits. By the time Pai left office, the system remained incomplete; it hadn't been integrated with many state and federal benefit systems. The deficiencies made it hard and slow to use, and sometimes, inaccurate in rendering decisions on who should qualify for help.

The U.S. government still turned to the same beleaguered system, known as the National Verifier, to administer the new broadband program anyway. It soon brought predictably troubling results, as millions of Americans reported hours-long delays and technical glitches. And the system failed to catch obvious signs of fraud, including families that lived implausibly far from schools where they claimed to have students. Even into this year, the verifier missed thousands of instances [new subscribers enrolled](#) in the benefit system all using the name of the same 4-year-old.

The threat of theft first grabbed the attention of the FCC's inspector general [last November](#). The watchdog warned that high-poverty schools had become an "entry point for fraud." And it rebuked telecom giants — without naming any — for paying commissions to agents that might have incentivized problematic enrollments. The inspector general said the "abuses" resembled those that "once plagued the FCC's Lifeline program."

In response, the FCC [immediately tightened eligibility](#), then required the roughly 200,000 school-related beneficiaries to submit to another review. Yet few enrollees completed the process: About 9,500 people, or less than 5 percent, requalified last year, according to data obtained by The Post. FCC aides believe the low response rate reflects the reality that low-income families are hard to reach, meaning thousands of innocent Americans may have lost benefits amid the crackdown.

"What we don't want to see is consumers be prevented from ever enrolling in a program again when it was the provider that was being misleading," said Jenna Leventoff, a senior policy counsel for Public Knowledge, a public-interest group.

The FCC's inspector general, however, [said in a May 2022](#) report that it was "confident" it had "saved the program millions of dollars each month in wasteful disbursements."

'Deceptive enrollment practices'

The man set up shop at an unmarked gray table, the stacks of WiFi enabled tablets in blue boxes piled high. It had become a common scene in Waukegan, Ill., an industrial suburb about 40 miles outside of Chicago — and Anne Durot was not pleased.

A volunteer with ConnectWaukegan, a local nonprofit, Durot and her peers had spent months trying to help low-income residents obtain quality internet — high-speed connections, funded by federal benefits, that might satisfy families' needs. At times, though, the aid workers found themselves struggling to break through a wide array of telecom providers that seemingly hoped to make a buck.

So on a sunny day in September, Durot and her colleagues strolled over to the table not far from Harry Poe Manor, a low-income housing community. They confronted the man, whose tablets had stickers identifying the company providing them as Maxsip, an obscure telecom firm. Online, the company promised prospective customers they could obtain "free mobile internet service," along with a free tablet

or other device with 4G speeds, less than the state-of-the-art 5G service millions of Americans receive through major providers.

“They’re sitting here in a public park taking advantage of residents who want free phones,” she said.

Israel Max, the chief executive of the company, said they are focused on helping “the people who need it” and noted he would investigate the matter. But the situation in Waukegan still highlighted a broader challenge facing the federal government, as it labors to keep close watch over an aid program that has become a business opportunity.

The latest trouble surfaced this year, months after regulators at the FCC and lawmakers on Capitol Hill set their sights on recalibrating the federal internet subsidy. In November, President Biden signed into law a sprawling \$1.2 trillion infrastructure package that replaced the Emergency Broadband Benefit with a new \$14 billion initiative, called the Affordable Connectivity Program. Democrats and Republicans maintained the spirit of the original discount — though Congress cut it to \$30 per month from \$50 — and they added new rules to clamp down on some of the worst abuses.

“In creating the Affordable Connectivity Program, the Administration worked with Democrats and Republicans in Congress to strengthen consumer protections and crack down on bad conduct by internet service providers,” said Robyn Patterson, a spokeswoman for the White House.

The revisions provided a sustained reprieve in places like Jefferson County, Wash., near Olympic National Park, where internet options are limited and bills can be “substantial,” said Jamie Pena, who oversees digital equity at the local library.

“I think it’s helping people get connected since the pandemic, even though we’ve reopened to some extent,” he said.

But the tweaks also opened the door for new challenges, particularly involving low-cost carriers that saw the revised federal program as a fresh source of new customers. Some firms dispatched a raft of sales agents in Allentown, Pa., Austin, Cleveland and other cities, troubling local officials, who said they saw suspicious marketing tactics on display.

Outside Chicago, Max said his company, Maxsip, sought to provide the best tablets and service it could given the meager size of the federal benefit paid to providers. “Our goal is to find solutions that can help people use the program,” he said.

But Max added the operation relies on a network of marketing firms, which hire their own agents to set up tents and help sign up low-income Americans. They are supposed to register with the government, identify themselves clearly and provide reliable information, but the chief executive acknowledged not everyone in the industry follows the rules.

“I’m shocked to hear it, but I’m not at the same time,” he said, pledging he would look into the matter.

The problem has been especially evident in the case of companies that participate in the Lifeline program. For these firms, which are supposed to serve the neediest Americans, the new broadband subsidy has proven lucrative: They could continue offering cheap, government-subsidized telephone service — and then tack on federal payments covering high-speed internet.

In other words, Lifeline providers can collect from Washington more than \$40 every month for each customer they enroll in both programs. That could come at the detriment of low-income families, however, who may be better served if they put their benefits not toward a single mobile phone but rather home internet that provides access for an entire family.

“They’re not breaking any rules, but people don’t have all the information,” said Angela Siefer, the executive director of the National Digital Inclusion Alliance, a network of organizations that aim to close the digital divide.

In person, and through texts and online advertisements, companies including Assurance Wireless allegedly pitched new and existing customers on the premise of free, unlimited phone data — a massive upgrade from the meager plans they previously had received under the government’s Lifeline program. Atop its website, in smaller font, the company informs people that the service is covered under the Affordable Connectivity Program.

Some customers did not appear to notice the disclosure at all, and later complained about the T-Mobile owned provider to the FCC. The marketing tactics also sparked more than just confusion: Some low-income subscribers told the FCC that they had already put their monthly broadband discounts to use on another provider. Once they were signed up with Assurance Wireless, their benefits were transferred — and suddenly they were on the hook for another bill that previously had been free.

Darrow, the T-Mobile spokeswoman, said customers could not have been enrolled against their will in part because the company “requires that they go through a series of steps and certifications in the application process.”

Even those who obtained the service they wanted soon experienced complications. Metro, another T-Mobile subsidiary, took months before it applied federal benefits to some customers’ accounts. In Gainesville, Ga., Wilmington, Del., Knoxville, Tenn., South Richmond Hill, N.Y., Ochelata, Okla., Lake Mary, Fla. and elsewhere, residents repeatedly said that Metro left their bills at full price for multiple billing periods — cutting into their already cash-strapped bank accounts.

“I am very poor and can’t afford to pay them every month,” a resident of Medford, Ore., told the FCC this August, two months after applying for federal aid that never arrived.

In response, Darrow said T-Mobile is not aware of any large-scale benefit delays. But she said delays are possible in the event of application lapses, like discrepancies in names and addresses, as the company looks to protect the program against fraud.

Across the telecom industry, the incidents prompted the FCC’s inspector general this March to warn Lifeline providers against engaging in “deceptive enrollment practices.” The agency said it had heard reports that “several” companies were “misleading Lifeline consumers into enrolling for undesired service” through the broadband benefit program.

In one example, the watchdog highlighted an unnamed firm that had “forced” consumers to obtain or transfer their monthly internet subsidies away from their existing provider in order to enroll in Lifeline. The firm referenced in the report was Q Link Wireless, according to documents The Post later obtained under FOIA from the inspector general.

John Nakahata, a lawyer for Q Link, described the issue in a statement as a “web script error.” He added that “no consumer was enrolled in ACP as a result,” as consent was collected later in the application process. Nakahata said the inspector general had not contacted the company before publishing its report in March.

Perez, the spokeswoman for the FCC, said the agency’s enforcement bureau as a general rule “follows up with consumer complaints related to ACP providers, including Q Link, to address whatever issue a consumer faces.”

“The Enforcement Bureau has been in touch with the OIG, and is conducting its own investigations and assessing whether there were any rule violations,” she said broadly.

	<p>In the face of these and other mounting concerns, the White House has sought to make it easier for low-income Americans to find and choose quality broadband plans. In May, Biden announced a partnership with 20 of the country's largest providers to improve their low-cost offerings. Between the announcement and October, more than 2.5 million people enrolled in the federal benefit program, according to administration officials.</p> <p>Vice President Harris, meanwhile, personally hit the road, touting the benefits of internet access — and the importance of affordable connectivity that some Americans still have not been able to obtain.</p> <p>“We created this program because we know when we connect folks with high-speed internet,” she said, “it is also a connection to opportunity — the opportunity to live a healthier, happier, and more prosperous life and, importantly, more affordable lives.”</p>
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HEADLINE	10/25 Celebrity deepfakes appear in advertising
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/deepfakes-of-celebrities-have-begun-appearing-in-ads-with-or-without-their-permission-11666692003?mod=hp_minor_pos1
GIST	<p>Celebrity deepfakes are coming to advertising.</p> <p>Among the recent entries: Last year, Russian telecommunications company MegaFon released a commercial in which a simulacrum of Hollywood legend Bruce Willis helps defuse a bomb.</p> <p>Just last week, Elon Musk seemed to star in a marketing video from real-estate investment startup reAlpha Tech Corp.</p> <p>And last month a promotional video for machine-learning firm Paperspace Co. showed talking semblances of the actors Tom Cruise and Leonardo DiCaprio.</p> <p>None of these celebrities ever spent a moment filming these campaigns. In the cases of Messrs. Musk, Cruise and DiCaprio, they never even agreed to endorse the companies in question.</p> <p>All the videos of digital simulations were created with so-called deepfake technology, which uses computer-generated renditions to make the Hollywood and business notables say and do things they never actually said or did.</p> <p>Some of the ads are broad parodies, and the meshing of the digital to the analog in the best of cases might not fool an alert viewer. Even so, the growing adoption of deepfake software could eventually shape the industry in profound ways while creating new legal and ethical questions, experts said.</p> <p>Authorized deepfakes could allow marketers to feature huge stars in ads without requiring them to actually appear on-set or before cameras, bringing down costs and opening new creative possibilities.</p> <p>But unauthorized, they create a legal gray area: Celebrities could struggle to contain a proliferation of unauthorized digital reproductions of themselves and the manipulation of their brand and reputation, experts said.</p> <p>“We’re having a hard enough time with fake information. Now we have deepfakes, which look ever more convincing,” said Ari Lightman, professor of digital media and marketing at Carnegie Mellon University’s Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy.</p> <p>U.S. lawmakers have begun to address the deepfake phenomenon. In 2019, Virginia outlawed the use of deepfakes in so-called revenge porn, Texas outlawed them in political campaigns and California banned them in both. Last year, the U.S. National Defense Authorization Act instructed the Department of Homeland Security to produce annual reports on threats posed by the technology.</p>

But experts said they aren't aware of laws specifically [addressing the use of deepfakes](#) in commercials.

Celebrities have had some success suing advertisers for the unauthorized use of their images under so-called right of publicity laws, said Aaron Moss, chair of the litigation department at law firm Greenberg Glusker. He cited Woody Allen's [\\$5 million settlement](#) with American Apparel in 2009 over the director's unapproved appearance on a billboard advertising the risqué clothing brand.

Both Paperspace and reAlpha had lawyers review the videos and took steps to ensure viewers understood that the celebrities depicted didn't actually endorse the companies' products or participate in the making of the videos, the companies said.

The Paperspace video originally appeared on its own website and was designed to educate users about deepfake technology, said Daniel Kobran, chief operating officer.

The Musk video by reAlpha included "robust disclaimers" establishing it as satire, said Christie Currie, chief marketing officer. So did a similar video reAlpha released last year, in which an ersatz version of the [Tesla](#) Inc. chief sat in a bubble bath and explained the concept of Regulation A+ investing, or equity crowdfunding.

The first Musk video went live days after reAlpha launched a public offering under regulation A+ in 2021. The video eventually accumulated 1.2 million views on YouTube, and drew active interest in reAlpha from "22K people in 83 countries," Ms. Currie said in an email. She added that the company avoided tying the video directly to its fundraising efforts.

"There's obviously always a little bit of risk with any parody type of content," Ms. Currie said in an interview, "but generally as long as it's meant to be educational, satirical, and you have disclaimers in place, there shouldn't be a problem as long as you're not pushing a transaction."

The likelihood that someone of Mr. Musk's stature would sue a startup for a deepfake video is low, and those companies might decide the risk is well worth the considerable publicity it would generate for them, Mr. Moss said.

"A lot of these companies purposefully get as close to the line as possible in order to almost troll the celebrities they're targeting," he said.

But the ease of creating deepfakes means some celebrities could soon be deluged by ads featuring their unauthorized, but very convincing likenesses, Mr. Moss said. It would be "death by a thousand cuts" if celebrities tried to go after every small business or individual creator that used the software, he added.

At the same time, the language in contracts written years before the technology existed may be vague enough to allow marketers to use existing footage to create new deepfake videos. For this reason, actors, athletes and other celebrities will at some point begin inserting clauses that prohibit any new such use of their likenesses in all commercial contracts they sign, said Mr. Lightman of Carnegie Mellon.

Tesla didn't respond to requests for comment on the videos.

The Bruce Willis ad recently led to reports that the actor had signed a contract granting Deepcake, a digital production company based in Tbilisi, Georgia, the rights to his image. Deepcake said the reports were inaccurate.

In 2020, Deepcake was hired by MegaFon and worked with other ad agencies and production companies to develop the deepfake campaign under a contract between Mr. Willis and MegaFon that has since expired, according to a Deepcake spokesperson. Deepcake wasn't a party to that contract, the spokesperson noted, referring requests for further detail to MegaFon.

	<p>Representatives for MegaFon didn't respond to multiple requests for comment. Mr. Willis's publicist didn't respond to questions about whether he had a contract with MegaFon. In March, Mr. Willis's family announced that he had been diagnosed with the brain disorder aphasia and would retire from acting.</p> <p>Companies most often request celebrity deepfake videos to use internally for training, communications, parties or other purposes—but not for ads, said Daynen Biggs, owner of Slack Shack Films, which produced the Elon Musk videos. One client recently requested a video starring former President Donald Trump in the role of Mr. Potter, the wealthy villain in the classic film "It's a Wonderful Life," Mr. Biggs said.</p> <p>"Deepfake technology does have the potential to be extremely harmful," said Mr. Biggs. "We are always careful that what we are creating is not damaging or deceitful, but an entertaining and fun way to share a message."</p> <p>But experts and practitioners say deepfake technology will become increasingly popular in advertising, because it can help brands and agencies produce more content faster while eliminating many of the expenses involved in production.</p> <p>"In six months, we made 10 completely different creatives and concepts with digital Bruce Willis working with different directors," said the Deepfake spokesperson. "It is difficult to imagine such a production with a real actor."</p>
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Terrorism, Extremism

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HEADLINE	10/26 Increased radicalization risks in Europe
SOURCE	https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/europe/2022/10/26/senior-europol-official-warns-of-increased-radicalisation-risks-in-europe/
GIST	<p>Europe's energy crisis is one of several factors that could increase radicalisation on the continent, deputy executive director of Europol operations Lt Gen Jean-Philippe Lecouffe warned on Tuesday, amid growing calls for increased international co-operation on counter-terrorism.</p> <p>"We must be careful," Lt Gen Lecouffe told <i>The National</i> on the margins of a conference on radicalisation and extremism at the European Parliament in Brussels.</p> <p>"There will probably be people who will be left helpless by the situation. That's a possible breeding ground for recruitment," he added, citing the economic crisis in Europe and climate change as other potential drivers of radicalisation.</p> <p>European energy ministers are struggling to agree on measures to bring down electricity bills that have soared following Russia's invasion of Ukraine earlier this year.</p> <p>Inflation across Europe neared 11 per cent in September and political leaders fear social unrest this winter if households cannot be heated properly and if businesses are forced to shut.</p> <p>Speaking earlier on Tuesday to an audience that included ambassadors to the European Union from the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia, Lt Gen Lecouffe called on all countries willing to co-operate with the institution to come forward.</p> <p>"Europol welcomes any partnership with any country and any information that can be useful to reinforce the security of EU citizens but also of citizens of the world travelling to Europe," he said.</p> <p>Some ambassadors demanded increased co-operation on counter-terrorism issues from the EU.</p>

“Terrorism cannot be addressed in isolation. You need to have international co-operation,” said Sri Lanka’s ambassador to Belgium and the EU Grace Asirwatham.

She said that international support for her country following the 2019 Sri Lanka Easter bombings that killed 269 people had been minimal.

“With the EU, we have political economic and development relations but counter-terrorism-related relations [are] lacking. We don’t get substantive co-operation.”

Organised by Czech MEP Tomas Zdechovsky, Tuesday’s conference on radicalisation and extremism brought into sharp focus how groups close to the Muslim Brotherhood had received funding from EU institutions.

“You’d think they’re outcast but they’re not,” said Lorenzo Vidino, director of the programme on extremism at George Washington University. He pointed to events organised by groups with close ties to the Muslim Brotherhood that were held in the same European Parliament conference room as Tuesday’s event.

But the EU also needs to work on preventing flows from outside Europe from reaching such groups that “slip under our radar”, said Natasha Bertaud, deputy head of Cabinet for EU Commission Vice President [Margaritis Schinas](#).

“We need to also have a more ample understanding in the commission and institutions but also in member states about how these organisations that challenge EU values are operating,” she said.

The EU only has one mechanism to screen foreign investments which was set up in 2019.

“I think more needs to be done to look at the values at stake, and not just at the strategic aspects of those investments,” said Ms Bertaud.

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HEADLINE	10/26 Taliban bans hookahs in Afghanistan
SOURCE	https://www.siasat.com/taliban-bans-hookahs-in-afghanistan-2442395/
GIST	<p>Kabul: The Taliban-led government in Afghanistan recently issued a fatwa, or Islamic decree, to ban hookahs, which had become a common sight in the war-torn country in recent years, the media reported.</p> <p>The militant Islamist group considers hookahs, also known as shisha, as an intoxicant, which is banned under Islam, RFE/RL reported.</p> <p>The ban on hookahs was announced in the western province of Herat earlier this month.</p> <p>It is unclear if the fatwa extends to the entire country.</p> <p>The move has had a severe impact on businesses in Herat, where scores of shisha cafes have been forced to close. Restaurants that offer shisha, meanwhile, have been forced to lay off staff as the number of customers fall.</p> <p>The ban on hookahs is the latest attempt by the Taliban to impose its extremist interpretation of Islamic Sharia law in Afghanistan, where the militant group forcibly seized power in August 2021.</p> <p>The Cafe Owners Association in Herat said that around 2,500 people had lost their jobs following the ban, aggravating an already dire economic situation for many residents, RFE/RL reported.</p> <p>The Taliban takeover triggered an economic collapse and worsened a major humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, where hunger and poverty are widespread.</p>

	<p>Azizul Rahman Mohajer, the provincial head of the Taliban's feared Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, said hookahs are "against Sharia".</p> <p>The Taliban, however, has not imposed any restrictions on naswar, a mild narcotic made from tobacco.</p> <p>It is popular among Afghan men, particularly in rural areas, including among Taliban fighters, RFE/RL reported.</p> <p>In April, the Taliban declared a blanket ban on illicit narcotics, although Afghan farmers say they continue to plant crops, including opium.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/26 UN: 1M suffer drought in al-Shabab areas
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/million-drought-hit-somalis-al-shabab-areas-92107253
GIST	<p>NAIROBI, Kenya -- The United Nations says close to 1 million drought-affected people in Somalia are in areas under the control or influence of the al-Shabab extremist group, and it appealed to the fighters to allow humanitarian access as famine threatens the country.</p> <p>The U.N. secretary-general's special representative in Somalia, James Swan, told journalists Wednesday that the 900,000 people in those areas represent a "relatively small" share of the more than 7 million in need as the Horn of Africa country faces its worst drought in several decades. Thousands of people have died, including many children.</p> <p>"It is obviously regrettable" that access remains difficult because of al-Shabab, Swan said, adding that talks continue with Somali organizations and private sector entities that might be able to reach places controlled or under the influence of the extremist group.</p> <p>Al-Shabab's hostility to aid efforts during a famine in Somalia a decade ago was a factor in the deaths of a quarter-million people.</p> <p>The U.N. weeks ago warned that without substantially more international assistance, a rare formal famine declaration could be made for parts of Somalia by the end of the year.</p> <p>Swan said the next announcement from an ongoing assessment of drought data should be made in the next three weeks.</p> <p>Somalia, like other countries with long-running humanitarian crises, saw support from many donors drop this year as the focus swung to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Swan noted a "substantial increase in delivery of assistance" in recent months, but the U.N. says more needs to be done.</p>
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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	10/25 World's children face high heat-wave 2050
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2022/10/26/extreme-heat-wave-children-2050-unicef/
GIST	<p>Catastrophic storms and unforgiving heat waves devastated many parts of the world this year, with Earth experiencing one of its hottest summers on record in 2022.</p> <p>Now, a new report from UNICEF estimates that nearly all the world's children — more than 2 billion — will be exposed to high heat-wave frequency by 2050. That is about 1.5 billion more children than are exposed today.</p>

“The models tell us this is the case, as does empirical lived experience,” Lauren Gifford, a research scientist at the University of Arizona, said in response to the report.

She added, “Children now and children who haven’t been born yet are going to exist in the world in very different ways, and some of those ways we can’t even conceive yet.”

In the report, UNICEF defines high-frequency areas as those with an average of 4.5 more heat waves per year. It also estimates that “virtually every child on earth” will face more frequent heat waves, even if the world achieves a “low greenhouse gas emission scenario” of about 1.7 degrees Celsius of warming.

Across several parts of the world, the unrelenting heat has proven deadly for all age groups this past summer. The United Kingdom reported [3,271 excess deaths](#) above the five-year average during government-issued heat health advisory periods between June and August, for example, while [France recorded](#) 13 percent more deaths in July and 11 percent more deaths in August compared with the same months in 2019.

Meanwhile, extreme heat has consistently been the United States’ deadliest weather event for at least the last 30 years, according to the [National Weather Service](#). Last year, a [study](#) also found that Africa and Asia had the highest proportion of deaths caused by non-optimal hot and cold temperatures between 2000 and 2019.

For children, heat waves pose an acute threat: Young children and infants [are more susceptible](#) to heat-related illnesses, in part because their bodies cannot regulate temperature as effectively as adults. Children also [lose fluid more quickly](#) and are at a greater risk of heat stroke because they lack the judgment needed to taper their physical exertion or rehydrate.

“Children, especially young children, are more vulnerable than adults to the effects of extreme heat, which can cause severe dehydration, respiratory trouble and make them more vulnerable to other diseases,” Catherine Russell, UNICEF’s executive director, said in the report.

Extreme heat is [also known](#) to trigger symptoms in people with asthma, an ailment that affects about [6 million children](#) in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Many American public schools do not have air conditioning due to cost burdens — about 41 percent of school districts nationwide need to update or replace heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems, the [U.S. Government Accountability Office](#) said. Meanwhile, a [2020 study](#) has found that hot classroom conditions are linked to reduced test scores and lowered learning, with a disproportionate impact on students of color.

“School is for many kids the respite from a hard life, and there are schools where you can’t sit and learn when it’s 100 degrees in the classroom or you can’t be in the building because they’re closing schools,” Gifford said.

She added: “Climate change is what we call a threat multiplier. It takes existing hazards and exacerbates them.”

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HEADLINE	10/25 WHO: fatal fungi threaten global health
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/fatal-fungi-threaten-global-health-who-says-11666708805?mod=hp_lead_pos12
GIST	<p>The World Health Organization created a list of fungi that it said pose a growing risk to human health, including yeasts and molds found in abundance in nature and the body.</p> <p>The WHO said Tuesday that the 19 species on the list merit urgent attention from public-health officials and drug developers. Four species were designated as threats of the highest priority: <i>Aspergillus fumigatus</i>, a mold found abundantly in nature; <i>Candida albicans</i>, which is commonly found in the human</p>

body; *Candida auris*, a highly deadly yeast; and *Cryptococcus neoformans*, a fungus that can cause deadly brain infections.

“Fungal infections are growing, and are ever more resistant to treatments, becoming a public-health concern worldwide” said Hanan Balkhy, the WHO’s assistant director-general.

Fungal infections are estimated to kill at least 1.6 million people yearly, according to Global Action for Fungal Infections, a research and fundraising organization. In the U.S., more than 75,000 people are hospitalized with fungal infections every year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said.

The WHO said the full impact of fungal infections globally is unknown because of a lack of data. The agency urged countries to strengthen surveillance of fungal pathogens and expand laboratory capacity to screen for fungal diseases.

Healthy people remain unlikely to contract a severe fungal infection, public-health experts said. But rates of serious fungal infections are expected to grow as fungi adapt to warming temperatures in ways that may make them more effective at infecting humans, the WHO said. The number of immunocompromised people and people with chronic diseases such as diabetes is also increasing, the agency said.

Immunocompromised people, including those with diseases such as HIV/AIDS and patients undergoing treatments such as chemotherapy and organ transplantation, and people with chronic conditions are at highest risk of severe fungal disease.

Threats to the general population are also growing, the WHO said, as some common fungal pathogens become more resistant to existing treatments, escalating the chances that more invasive forms of the pathogens could develop.

Aspergillus fumigatus, which most people inhale every day, can cause disease of the lungs but can also colonize other parts of the body including the brain, infectious-disease experts said. Hospitalizations related to severe *Aspergillus* infections [have been rising](#) in the U.S. since at least 2004, a 2019 study in the journal BMC Public Health showed.

Candida albicans causes oral thrush and vaginal yeast infections, and can also infect the blood, heart and other internal organs.

“The general public doesn’t appreciate how serious fungal infections can be,” said Felipe Santiago-Tirado, a fungal-infection expert at the University of Notre Dame. “Mortality can be very high.”

The mortality rate of *Candida auris*, which often spreads in hospitals, can be as high as 60%, the CDC said. The first known *Candida auris* infection was identified in a person in Japan in 2009. [Reported Candida auris cases](#) in the U.S. rose to 700 in 2020 from 10 in 2015, the CDC said.

Globally, *Cryptococcus neoformans* is a major cause of illness in patients with HIV/AIDS and kills at least 180,000 people annually, the agency said.

There are four classes of antifungal medicines for invasive fungal disease, and most drugs in these classes are toxic, even at low doses, infectious-disease experts say. A new class to treat severe diseases hasn’t been approved in over 20 years. Fungal infections receive less than 1.5% of all infectious-disease research funding, the WHO said.

Several antifungal drugs in development, including [Scynexis](#) Inc.’s ibrexafungerp and [Pfizer](#) Inc.’s fosmanogepix, have been shown in clinical trials to be effective against *Aspergillus* and *Candida* infections. [Cidara Therapeutics](#) Inc. has submitted its drug rezafungin for Food and Drug Administration approval to treat *Candida* infections, including severe disease; and F2G Ltd. said its antifungal olorofim had been found effective at eradicating *Aspergillus* and other rare molds in a Phase 2 clinical trial.

HEADLINE	10/25 Americans magic number for retirement
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-new-magic-number-to-retire-comfortably-11666735756?mod=hp_lead_pos11
GIST	<p>The magic number to retire just went even higher.</p> <p>Americans now think they need at least \$1.25 million to retire comfortably, a 20% jump from a year ago, according to a survey released Tuesday by financial services company Northwestern Mutual.</p> <p>While Americans say they will need more money after they retire, the average amount in a retirement savings account has dropped this year to \$86,869, an 11% decline from 2021, the survey said.</p> <p>The expected retirement age also ticked up to 64 years of age, compared with 62.6 last year.</p> <p>Christian Mitchell, chief customer officer at Northwestern Mutual, said rising inflation and volatility in financial markets are weighing on people's mind-sets.</p> <p>"These factors are leading many people to recalibrate their thinking about how much they'll need to retire and how long it will take them to get there," he said.</p> <p>The survey, which polled 2,381 American adults in February, comes as consumers have been squeezed by rising inflation. That has put pressure on their spending power and their ability to save.</p> <p>Stock and bond markets have also fallen sharply this year. A typical 60/40 portfolio, where investors put 60% of their money into the stock market and 40% of their money into bonds, is on track to deliver its worst returns in 100 years as of mid-October, according to Bank of America.</p> <p>As inflation has surged, the federal government has taken steps to try to mitigate the pain for retirees and investors.</p> <p>The government increased Social Security checks by 8.7% for 2023, the largest cost-of-living adjustment to benefits in four decades. The Internal Revenue Service also made inflation adjustments for 401(k) savings accounts, increasing contribution limits by \$2,000 to \$22,500 for 2023. About 60 million American workers have 401(k) plans, according to the Investment Company Institute.</p> <p>The Northwestern Mutual survey found that many Americans are worried about their prospects for retirement. About four in 10 people said they don't think they will have enough money when they retire. Nearly half of the people surveyed also said they can envision scenarios where Social Security no longer exists.</p> <p>The Covid-19 pandemic has also shaken up retirement plans for Americans. About one in four people said they now plan to retire later because of the pandemic, the survey said. Of those who are putting off retirement, 59% said they wanted to work more to save money. And 45% said they were worried about rising healthcare costs or had unexpected medical costs.</p> <p>But about 15% of people said they planned to retire early because of the pandemic.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/25 'Fossil fuel addiction' kills, starves millions
SOURCE	https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Doctors-say-fossil-fuel-addiction-kills-17534266.php
GIST	<p>Extreme weather from climate change triggered hunger in nearly 100 million people and increased heat deaths by 68% in vulnerable populations worldwide as the world's "fossil fuel addiction" degrades public health each year, doctors reported in a new study.</p>

Worldwide the burning of coal, oil, natural gas and biomass forms air pollution that kills 1.2 million people a year, including 11,800 in the United States, according to a report Tuesday in the prestigious medical journal Lancet.

“Our health is at the mercy of fossil fuels,” said University College of London health and climate researcher Marina Romanello, executive director of the Lancet Countdown. “We’re seeing a persistent addiction to fossil fuels that is not only amplifying the health impacts of climate change, but which is also now at this point compounding with other concurrent crises that we’re globally facing, including the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis, energy crisis and food crisis that were triggered after the war in Ukraine.”

In the annual Lancet Countdown, which looks at climate change and health, nearly 100 researchers across the globe highlighted 43 indicators where climate change is making people sicker or weaker, with a new look at hunger added this year.

“And the health impacts of climate change are rapidly increasing,” Romanello said.

In praising the report, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres put it even more bluntly than the doctors: “The climate crisis is killing us.”

New analysis in the report blamed 98 million more cases of self-reported hunger around the world in 2020, compared to 1981-2010, on “days of extreme heat increasing in frequency and intensity due to climate change.”

Researchers looked at 103 countries and found that 26.4% of the population experienced what scientists call “food insecurity” and in a simulated world without climate change’s effects that would have only been 22.7%, Romanello said.

“Can I say that every bit of food insecurity is due to climate change? Of course not. But we think that in this complex web of causes, it is a very significant contributor and it’s only going to get worse,” said pediatrician Dr. Anthony Costello, Lancet Countdown co-chair and head of the University College of London’s Global Health Institute.

Computerized epidemiology models also show an increase in annual heat related deaths from 187,000 a year from 2000 to 2004 to an annual average of 312,000 a year the last five years, Romanello said.

When there’s a heat wave, like the record-shattering 2020 one in the Pacific Northwest or this summer’s English heat wave, emergency room doctors know when they go to the hospital “we’re in for a challenging shift,” said study co-author Dr. Renee Salas, a Boston emergency room physician and professor at the Harvard School of Public Health.

The air pollution from burning coal, oil and gas also pollutes the air, causing about 1.2 million deaths a year worldwide from small particles in the air, the scientists and report said. The 1.2 million figure is based on “immense scientific evidence,” Harvard’s Salas said.

“Burning gas in cars or coal in electricity plants have been found to cause asthma in children and cause heart problems,” Salas said.

“Prescribing an inhaler isn’t going to fix the cause of an asthma attack for a young boy living next to a highway where cars are producing dangerous pollutants and climate change is driving increases in wildfire smoke, pollen and ozone pollution,” Salas said.

Both air pollution and heat deaths are bigger problems for the elderly and the very young and especially the poor, said University of Louisville environmental health professor Natasha DeJarnett, a study co-author.

	<p>Sacoby Wilson, a professor of environmental health at the University of Maryland who wasn't part of the report, said the Lancet study makes sense and frames climate change's effects on health in a powerful way.</p> <p>"People are dying now as we speak. Droughts, desertification, not having food, flooding, tsunamis," Wilson said. "We're seeing what happened in Pakistan. What you see happening in Nigeria. "</p> <p>Both Wilson and emergency room physician and professor of medicine at the University of Calgary Dr. Courtney Howard, who wasn't part of the study, said report authors are correct to call the problem an addiction to fossil fuels, similar to being addicted to harmful drugs.</p> <p>The Lancet report shows the increasing deaths from air pollution and heat yet people are "continuing in habitual behavior despite known harms," which is the definition of addiction, Howard said. "Thus far our treatment of our fossil fuel addiction has been ineffective."</p> <p>"This isn't a rare cancer that we don't have a treatment for," Salas said. "We know the treatment we need. We just need the willpower from all of us and our leaders to make it happen."</p>
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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	10/25 Renton: juveniles in shootout arrested
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/four-juveniles-arrested-after-shootout-stolen-car-renton/3X7LJTAF65E3BIEKEFCVFG6BJQ/
GIST	<p>A shootout between the occupants of two cars ended in a crash and several arrests in Renton on Tuesday, according to the Renton Police Department.</p> <p>At about 12:56 p.m. on Oct. 25, officers were on the scene of a car collision at Southport and Logan Avenue.</p> <p>According to police, a conflict started in a Renton apartment complex between four juveniles in a stolen Kia and a second vehicle.</p> <p>The occupants of the Kia shot at the second vehicle because they were being chased.</p> <p>When the Kia attempted to flee the scene, it crashed into an unsuspecting driver.</p> <p>The juveniles ran from the scene, but all were eventually located and arrested after a brief foot pursuit.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/25 Arrest: ex-US military pilot worked in China
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/10/25/asia/us-military-pilot-china-arrested-australia-intl-hnk/index.html
GIST	<p>A former US military pilot and flight instructor who worked in China was arrested in Australia and faces extradition to the United States, Australian court documents and company records show.</p> <p>Australian Federal Police arrested Daniel Edmund Duggan, 54, on Friday in the rural town of Orange in New South Wales, and he appeared in court there the same day, court records show and two police sources and his lawyer confirmed.</p> <p>His lawyer appeared by videoconference, and Duggan was denied bail and taken to the nearby Bathurst jail, two of the sources said.</p>

Duggan is a former US citizen and the federal police were acting on a US request for his arrest ahead of likely formal extradition proceedings, said one of the police sources, who was not authorized to speak publicly.

Duggan's next court appearance will be in Sydney in November to consider any bail application. Details of the US arrest warrant and the charges he faces are sealed.

"An individual was arrested on October 21, 2022, pursuant to a request from the United States of America for their provisional arrest," a spokesman for the federal Attorney-General's Department said in a written statement. "As the matter is before the courts, it would not be appropriate to comment further."

The arrest came the same week Britain warned dozens of former military pilots to stop working in China or face prosecution on national security grounds under new laws. Australia is also investigating reports some of its former fighter pilots have been approached to work in China.

An aviation source said the FBI sought Duggan because of his work in China. His lawyer, Dennis Miralis of Nyman, Gibson and Miralis, said he could not comment.

Duggan moved to Australia after a decade in the US military and started a business called Top Gun Tasmania, hiring former US and British military pilots to offer tourists joyrides in fighter jets, company records show and aviation sources confirmed.

Duggan also flew ex-military aircraft in Australian air shows, three pilots said.

Top Gun Tasmania's website says Duggan flew Harrier jump jets in the US Marines and was an air combat instructor.

He moved to Beijing in 2014 and soon after sold Top Gun Tasmania, filings in Australia for the company show.

Duggan's LinkedIn profile said he has been working in Qingdao, China, since 2017 as the managing director of AVIBIZ Limited, described as "a comprehensive aviation consultancy company with a focus on the fast growing and dynamic Chinese Aviation Industry."

Hong Kong company records show AVIBIZ Limited was registered there by Australian passport holder Daniel Edmund Duggan in 2017 and dissolved in 2020.

Duggan could not be immediately reached for comment.

Under Australia's extradition treaty with the United States, the US government will have 60 days to make an extradition request. The treaty allows Australian citizens to be extradited.

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HEADLINE	10/25 Commission: Chicago hate crimes up 71%
SOURCE	https://news.wttw.com/2022/10/25/hate-crimes-chicago-71-according-city-report
GIST	<p>Adidas says it's ending its partnership with musician and fashion designer Ye following recent antisemitic comments.</p> <p>The rapper — formerly known as Kanye West — has come under fire for a series of remarks against the Jewish community.</p> <p>Locally, Chicago's Commission on Human Relations says hate crimes are up in the city by 71%. The most frequent targets being Jewish and Black residents.</p> <p>David Goldenberg, Midwest Regional Director of the Anti-Defamation League, says the latest numbers follow a worrying trend.</p>

“We know that these numbers are up and in fact, it is just a continuation frankly of what we’ve seen over the last four or five years,” Goldenberg said.

The Anti-Defamation League has been tracking antisemitic incidents since 1979, and Goldenberg says the trends are quite concerning.

“Between 2016 and 2021, ADL tracked 430% increase in antisemitic incidents here in Illinois,” he said. However, many of hate crimes go unreported.

“First and foremost, there’s a lack of trust between many marginalized and targeted communities and law enforcement. Individuals who are victims don’t feel safe going to police,” Goldenberg said.

Recently, the Chicago Police Department has [decided](#) not to fire the officer affiliated with the Proud Boys. The Proud Boys are a right-wing extremist group, labeled by the [Southern Poverty Law Center](#) as a hate group.

“We know that this particular incident really is just one example of a really big problem and that is extremists who are infiltrating law enforcement,” he said.

The ADL released a [report](#) identifying thousands of individuals in the military, law enforcement, elected officials and first responders who were listed as Oath Keepers, another far-right extremist group.

The ADL identified 21 members of Illinois law enforcement, though no names have been revealed. Goldenberg believes hate needs to stop being normalized.

“That requires us to speak out. It requires us to share facts and respond to misinformation,” he said. “It requires us to all show strength together so that when this type of antisemitism, when this type hate shows its ugly face, we collectively as a community shove it back underneath the rock from which it came.”

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HEADLINE	10/25 Guilty plea: drove SUV into protest crowd
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/man-pleads-guilty-to-killing-minneapolis-protester-last-year/
GIST	<p>MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A man who was intoxicated when he drove his SUV into a crowd of protesters in Minneapolis last year, killing one and injuring several others, has pleaded guilty to murder and assault just as his trial was set to begin.</p> <p>Nicholas Kraus, 36, in a plea deal with prosecutors, admitted Monday to killing Deona Knajdek, one of the protesters who gathered in the city’s Uptown neighborhood after members of a U.S. Marshals Service task force fatally shot Winston Boogie Smith Jr., a 32-year-old Black man. The 31-year-old Minneapolis woman also was known as Deona Marie Erickson.</p> <p>Prosecutors said Kraus was visibly intoxicated when he sped up and tried to “jump” a car that protesters were using as a barricade, pushing it into the group in June 2021.</p> <p>As part of the plea deal, Kraus’ second-degree murder charge was changed from “intentional” to “unintentional,” and one of two counts of second-degree assault with a dangerous weapon was dropped. Kraus pleaded guilty to the second assault charge. He could face more than 17 years in prison at sentencing in November.</p> <p>According to the criminal complaint, Kraus told officers he believed he needed to jump over a car that protesters were using as a barricade, and though he saw people in the area, he accelerated and did not try to brake. It also says he admitted he thought he might have hit someone. There was nothing in the</p>

	<p>criminal complaint to suggest Kraus' actions were motivated by political views or anger at the protesters.</p> <p>Kraus drove into protesters a year after George Floyd was killed by police, a death that sparked widespread protests and unrest in the city and around the nation. Law enforcement shootings of other Black men have only inflamed tensions further.</p> <p>Records show Kraus has five drunken driving convictions, most recently in 2016 in Anoka County. He also was convicted numerous times of driving without a valid license and for assault, failure to have auto insurance and giving police a false name. He lost his license after a drunken driving conviction in 2013.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/25 Australia cocaine-related deaths on rise
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/g5vm7b/cocaine-related-deaths-are-on-the-rise-in-australia
GIST	<p>Cocaine-related deaths are on the rise in Australia, according to a new study from the University of NSW's National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre. The study, which looked at data from 2000-2021, found 884 deaths related to cocaine in the last 21 years – with 398 of those occurring in the last five years.</p> <p>“What’s reflected is a 20% increase each year from 2012 onwards,” head author and leading expert on the morbidity and mortality associated with illicit drug use, Professor Shane Drake, told VICE.</p> <p>“The amount of cocaine produced in the last year or two is the most that's ever been produced. And what we've seen in this country is an increase in reported use, an increase in seizures, an increase in people seeking treatment and emergency services.”</p> <p>“What this suggests is that there's more cocaine and when you get more of any drug, you will get more harm.”</p> <p>According to Drake, cocaine deaths 20 years ago were usually connected to people with a longstanding history of drug-related problems. Now, over half of these deaths are users with no known history of problematic drug use.</p> <p>“We found clinically significant changes in case profiles across the study period that suggest a broadening of those who use cocaine and its associated harm,” Drake said.</p> <p>“There's 884 people we know and we were conservative in that. You have to remember that people can use cocaine for a long time, and have serious heart damage, then stop using cocaine. They might die of that heart disease five years later, but that wouldn't be picked up.”</p> <p>According to the results, the majority of cocaine-related deaths were due to unintentional drug toxicity (70 percent), and usually involved a cardiovascular event. Others included intentional self-harm (18 percent) and incidents that involved motor vehicles (12 percent).</p> <p>In 93 percent of cases, other drugs were involved – with alcohol present in close to half.</p> <p>“With drug related deaths, what you get is a combination of drugs that kill people. Alcohol actually intensifies the effects of cocaine,” said Drake.</p> <p>“So when you look at any death, what you’d be looking at it, in most cases, is the combination of effects. But all of these people showed signs that were typical of cocaine toxicity.”</p> <p>According to Drake, the perception of coke as a safer alternative to drugs like crystal methamphetamine has also contributed to its rise in popularity.</p>

	“But I don't want to give the impression that everyone who uses cocaine is going to die of cocaine,” he said. “I think what we need to get across is that cocaine has an image sometimes of being a reasonably “benign, fluffy” drug. And it's not. It can kill and it does kill.”
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HEADLINE	10/25 Inside Iran's notorious prison massive fires
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/10/25/iran-evin-prison-fire-protests/
GIST	<p>For more than 40 years, Evin prison in Tehran has been the most visible symbol of the Islamic Republic's authoritarian rule, a menacing complex built on fear and absolute control. Unrest rarely breaches the prison walls.</p> <p>But on the night of Oct. 15, massive fires tore through Evin, killing at least eight people and injuring 61, according to state media. Families of prisoners fear the true toll is much higher.</p> <p>The disaster coincided with nationwide demonstrations that have swept across Iran over the past month, and a brutal crackdown by the country's security forces, who have killed dozens of protesters and arrested thousands more. Some of those detained have been taken to Evin, where rights groups have documented a long history of torture and other abuses.</p> <p>Extraordinary videos from the night of the fire show people shouting, “Death to the dictator” and “Death to Khamenei,” a reference to Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and a rallying cry of demonstrators, as shots are fired and flames rise above the prison.</p> <p>To understand what happened that night, The Washington Post analyzed dozens of photos and videos, spoke to activists, lawyers, former prisoners and families of current prisoners, and consulted with experts in arson, weapons and audio forensics.</p> <p>The findings are damning: At least one fire that night appears to have been started intentionally at a time when prisoners are locked in their cells. The most deadly fire erupted near the scene of the arson. As prisoners tried to flee the fire, guards and other security forces assaulted them with batons, live ammunition, metal pellets and explosives.</p> <p>The fires</p> <p>The unrest started about 8:45 p.m., according to a video posted by Mizan, the news site of Iran's judiciary. The video claims that a fight broke out in Ward 7 and that prisoners then set fire to a nearby textiles workshop.</p> <p>Satellite imagery analyzed by The Post does, indeed, show extensive damage to the roof of the two-story building in the center of the prison that houses the textiles workshop, as well as a religious hall called a Hussainiya on the level below.</p> <p>That was not the only fire in the prison that night, however, and it was probably not the first.</p> <p>Before any flames were visible from the outside of the textiles workshop, videos show at least three individuals throwing flammable liquid onto a fire atop an adjacent building in Ward 7, according to Phillip Fouts, a certified fire investigator. The fire on the roof probably didn't catch, he said, because of a lack of combustible material. Satellite imagery taken in the aftermath shows only minimal damage.</p> <p>Yet visuals show another fire blazing high into the air inside the grounds of Ward 7, close to where the arsonists had previously fed the flames on the rooftop. This second fire appeared to originate by the entrance to Ward 7, near a guard station, according to a former inmate who spent several years inside Evin. He spoke to The Post on the condition of anonymity, fearing backlash from the government.</p> <p>The Post cannot confirm how the fire inside Ward 7 started, but its proximity to the intentional fire is telling. And it is the fire inside Ward 7 — which the government later blamed on prisoners without</p>

providing evidence — that offered a pretext for the chaotic and deadly crackdown on inmates that followed.

The gates to the wards were locked at 5 p.m. each night after roll call, according to the former prisoner. Families of current prisoners say their movements have been further restricted since the protests broke out last month. This makes it unlikely that inmates could have accessed any of the three areas where the fires broke out.

Amnesty International has reported that the sounds of gunshots and screaming in Ward 7 could be heard by prisoners in neighboring wards as early as 8 p.m., well before the first flames were visible, and that “authorities sought to justify their bloody crackdown on prisoners under the guise of battling the fire.” Iranian state television later said that security forces were responding to a “premeditated” escape plan by prisoners.

“This was a strange incident that happened at a time that the prisoners should be sleeping,” said Saleh Nikbakht, a lawyer who has several clients in Evin, speaking to The Post by phone from Tehran. “This was a big event.”

Ward 7 houses thieves and financial criminals, according to the government, though the former inmate told The Post that more violent criminals were also held there. Just as importantly, it borders Ward 8, where dissidents and political prisoners are held, and where the smoke from the fire eventually spread.

A deadly crackdown

As noxious smoke poured from Ward 7 into Ward 8, labor rights activist Arash Johari began to cough and gag, he told his family.

Johari, 30, said he and the rest of the prisoners in Ward 8 faced a stark choice: smash through the gates or suffocate. As they burst through the locked doors and spilled into the prison yard they were met by enraged guards, who brutalized them with batons, bullets and tear gas, according to family members who spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of repercussions from authorities.

Steven Beck, an audio forensics expert, and researchers at Carnegie Mellon University, separately analyzed videos provided by The Post and found that more than 100 distinct gunshots were fired. Both analyses identified automatic gunfire “consistent with an AK-47” as well as sounds that likely came from handguns and rifles.

Mohammad Khani, a dissident in Ward 8, was blasted in the chest with metal pellets and took a bullet in his side, according to a family member, who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Beck determined there were also at least two explosions “consistent with grenades.” Amaal Kotlarski, a senior analyst and weapons expert from Janes, the intelligence defense provider, examined footage and audio provided by The Post and concluded stun grenades were probably launched into the prison, “judging by the flash and audible blast” heard in the video.

“[Johari] said he had been beaten in the head with a baton and that he was dizzy and felt nauseous,” said his family member. “He also said he had blurred vision and his head was bleeding.”

The experiences of Khani and Johari that night could not be independently verified by The Post, but they were consistent with the findings of Amnesty, as well as with past investigations by The Post documenting the use of excessive force against protesters in Iran.

Reinforcements were dispatched to Evin to deal with the unrest, including “security forces, judicial forces, the Basij and special police units,” prison official Heshmatollah Hayat Al Ghaib said in the judiciary video. The Basij are a paramilitary branch of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and have taken a leading role in the violent suppression of demonstrators.

The fire at Evin had been put out and the unrest was brought under control shortly before midnight, according to the government, though sources who have family and friends living around the prison told The Post that gunfire could still be heard as late as 2 a.m. Sunday.

Three buses full of prisoners from Ward 8, including Johari, were sent from Evin to Rajai Shahr prison, about 40 miles west, according to Johari's family member. The judiciary video shows these buses being escorted by police cars with flashing red lights.

Johari was promised an X-ray for his head injuries at Rajai Shahr but authorities did not follow through, his family said.

Khani contacted his family Sunday to tell them he had been badly wounded. His relatives fought for him to get outside medical care and prison authorities eventually relented, taking him to a nearby hospital.

The bullet in Khani's side was approximately two fingers deep inside his body and required surgery, his family member said, alleging that the doctors did not stitch his wound up properly or give him antibiotics before sending him back to Evin. He can only walk now with the aid of other political prisoners in Ward 8, they said.

Dozens of other families flocked to Evin on Sunday morning to get news of their loved ones. They were turned away by soldiers until a large crowd had formed and began beating on the gate, demanding answers. Many mothers, thinking their children were dead, wailed with grief.

"When families went up as a group to ask questions [the guards] insisted that people come up one-by-one or else guards would be called to beat them," said Johari's relative, who talked to families at the prison that day. "All they kept saying is 'Go home and we'll contact you.'"

Farther away, other families were gripped by a similar fear. Among those held at Evin are Siamak Namazi and Emad Sharghi, two Iranian American business executives.

When the unrest broke out Saturday night, Namazi was moved from Ward 4 to Ward 2A, which is run by the IRGC, according to his brother Babak. Namazi could hear the gunfire and smell the smoke during the unrest, his brother told The Post in a telephone interview from Dubai.

"It's important for President Biden to see how close we came. It could have been Siamak and Emad who got killed," said Babak. "It shows the literal urgency and the life-threatening situation that they're in."

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HEADLINE	10/25 El Salvador busts migrant trafficking ring
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/el-salvador-nabs-11-charged-migrants-15000-reach-92078584
GIST	<p>SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador -- Police in El Salvador said Tuesday they have arrested 11 alleged members of a migrant trafficking ring that charged as much as \$15,000 to smuggle migrants to the United States.</p> <p>Prosecutors said in a report the traffickers charged dozens of migrants between \$10,000 and \$15,000 to make the trip. The higher amount was charged for taking unaccompanied children across Guatemala and Mexico to the U.S.</p> <p>Prosecutors said they raided 16 properties near the border with Guatemala, and seized money, drugs and vehicles.</p> <p>Some 2.5 million Salvadorans live in the United States, and tens of thousands more go north every year.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/25 School shootings worst year on record
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SOURCE	https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20221025-school-shootings-are-already-at-a-record-in-2022-with-months-still-to-go
GIST	<p>As a Michigan teen pleaded guilty on Oct. 24, 2022, to killing four students in a December 2021 attack, America was learning of yet another school shooting. This time, it was a performance arts high school in St. Louis, where a former student opened fire, killing two and injuring at least seven others before dying in a shootout with police.</p> <p>The fact that yet another school shooting took place within hours of a gunman in a separate case appearing in court underscores how often these events take place in the U.S. As criminologists who have built a comprehensive database to log all school shootings in the U.S., we know that deadly school gun violence in America is now a regular occurrence – with incidents only becoming more frequent and deadlier.</p> <p>Our records show that seven more people died in mass shootings at U.S. schools between 2018 and 2022 – a total of 52 – than in the previous 18 years combined since the watershed 1999 Columbine High School massacre.</p> <p>Since the February 2018 mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida, moreover, more than 700 people have been shot at U.S. schools on football fields and in classrooms, hallways, cafeterias and parking lots.</p> <p>Many of these shootings were not the mass killing events that schools typically drill for. Rather, they were an extension of rising everyday gun violence.</p> <p>More Frequent and Deadlier</p> <p>There have been shootings at U.S. schools almost every year since 1966, but in 2021 there were a record 250 shooting incidents – including any occurrence of a firearm being discharged, be it related to suicides, accidental shootings, gang-related violence or incidents at after-hours school events.</p> <p>That’s double the annual number of shooting incidents recorded in the previous three years – in both 2018 and 2019, 119 shootings were logged, and there were 114 incidents in 2020.</p> <p>With more than two months left, 2022 is already the worst year on record. As of Oct. 24, there have been 257 shootings on school campuses – passing the 250 total for all of 2021.</p> <p>Many of these incidents have been simple disputes turned deadly because teenagers came to school angry and armed. At East High in Des Moines, Iowa, in March 2022, for example, six teens allegedly fired 42 shots in an incident that took place during school dismissal time. The hail of gunfire killed one boy and critically injured two female bystanders. The district attorney described the case as one of the most complex murder investigations their office has ever conducted, partly because six handguns were used.</p> <p>At Miami Gardens High in Florida that same month, two teens are alleged to have sprayed more than 100 rounds with a rifle and handgun modified for fully automatic fire. They targeted a student standing in front of the school, but bullets penetrated the building, striking two students sitting inside.</p> <p>A similar situation unfolded outside Roxborough High in Philadelphia in October. A lunchtime dispute among students allegedly turned into a targeted shooting after a football scrimmage. Five teenage shooters are believed to have fired 60 shots at five classmates leaving the game, killing a 15-year-old. In each of these cases, multiple student shooters fired dozens of shots.</p> <p>The tally for 2022 also includes incidents involving lone shooters.</p> <p>In April, a sniper with 1,000 rounds of ammunition and six semiautomatic rifles fired from a fifth-floor window overlooking the Edmund Burke School in Washington, D.C. at dismissal. A student, parent, school security officer and bystander were wounded before the shooter died by suicide.</p>

Threats, Hoaxes and False Alarms

The increase in shootings in and around school buildings has many parents, students and teachers on edge. An October 2022 Pew Research survey found that [one-third of parents](#) report being “very worried” or “extremely worried” about a shooting at their child’s school.

Aside from the near daily occurrences of actual school shootings, there are also the near misses and false alarms that only add to the heightened sense of threat.

In September, a potential attack was averted in Houston when police got a tip that a [student planned to chain the cafeteria doors shut](#) and shoot students who were trapped inside. The following day near Dallas, another tip sent police scrambling to stop a vehicle on the way to a high school homecoming football game. [Two teens had a loaded semiautomatic rifle](#) and planned to commit a mass shooting at the stadium, it is alleged.

There have also been [thousands](#) of false reports of shootings this year. Hoaxes, [swatting calls](#), even a viral [TikTok school shooting challenge](#) have sent schools across the nation into lockdown. Dozens, possibly hundreds, of these threats are [automated 911 calls from overseas](#), but police have no choice but to respond.

People are so much on edge that a [popped balloon](#) at one California school in September led to an active shooter response from police. The sound of a [metal pipe banging](#) in August caused thousands of people to flee an Arkansas high school football stadium for fear of being shot. A [loud bang from a chair being thrown](#) caused a code red lockdown and parents to rush to a Florida high school.

A Better Way?

The rising annual tally of school shootings has occurred despite enhanced school security in the [two decades since the Columbine massacre](#). Metal detectors, clear backpacks, bulletproof chalkboards, lockdown apps, automatic door locks and cameras have not stopped the rise in school shootings. In fact, the May 2022 mass shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, provides a case study in [systemic failure](#) across the school safety enterprise.

Federal [legislation](#) passed in the wake of Uvalde will provide districts with money to hire additional school social workers, or pay for better communication mechanisms in school buildings to address the [warning signs](#) of violence missed in [dozens of high-profile attacks](#).

It is aimed at better identifying and helping at-risk students before they turn to violence. However, another area that needs attention is students’ ready access to firearms.

Some school shooters, [like the perpetrator in Uvalde](#), are young adults old enough to get their guns legally from gun stores, prompting questions over whether some states need to reconsider a minimum age for firearms sales.

Meanwhile, most [school shooters get their guns from home](#), making safe storage of firearms a public health priority.

But many children get their guns from the streets. Preventing weapons from getting into the hands of potential school shooters will require police and policymakers to devote resources toward cracking down on straw purchasers – those who buy firearms for someone else – and getting stolen weapons, [unserialized ghost guns](#) and guns modified with [auto-sears](#) to make them fully automatic off the streets.

Such measures could be what it takes to stop the tragic normalization of school shootings.

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